A THEOLOGY OF LOVE: A SANKOFA MODEL

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ABSTRACT

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There is a universal cry for LOVE, creating the vibration that LOVE MATTERS. This divine call is to take action to love God, to love self, and to love community. Love is the passion that compels action and the transformation of lives, a movement in and with the Spirit of God and the spirit of the ancestors. It is a life's journey of discovery, introspectively and outwardly, to know God, know self, and know community. The Spirit is God and God's energy moving in the universe.

Before I was in my mother's womb, I've been on a journey of love. Love, a seed planted in my mother's womb and matured into an embryo, fetus, and being. Love, the final word uttered by my father before transitioning. All my life from the womb, Jamaica through now, the call to love started with God, self, family, and community. In this construct, I initially chose to endeavor in a development of a "Theology of Love" within my community of Faith. A Jesus-Centered Faith Community (JCFC) established over 25 years ago located in the Canarsie section of Brooklyn, New York. JCFC has been upholding the simple yet profound practices of putting God first and loving people to life, family by family. Putting God first is a key standard for disciples within this faith community. This monotheistic love centric thought is a central principle of JCFC striving to demonstrate through their deeds and actions agape love towards fellow disciples, families, neighbors, and the world. The communal experience of God's unconditional love manifested in their life experiences made JCFC unique in the ways they see and experience God's favor.

The wisdom of my mentors was to do this project at JCFC, my home church. Thus, my project proposal was initially approved utilizing this site. Subsequently, after prayerful consideration and consultation, I was led to refocus my work in collaboration with the 313+ Ancestors Speak Project. This realignment provided more diversity and allowed me the opportunity to expand beyond my comfort zone. The spirit of the ancestors redirected me for a journey to Elizabeth, New Jersey which would take me back to the land of my ancestors.

Do we all have the opportunity that the Declaration of Independence states of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness? What do we need to do to make it happen? A Theology of Love creates an opportunity for descendants of diverse linage to gather together in collaborative love.

The formation of this dissertation is by way of listening to the call of Love. In addition to storytelling, the thesis outlines actionable steps to take in a seven-pillar approach which is entailed in "The Journey to Love." In life's journey, THE ANCESTORS SPEAK.

Dedicated to:

My Dad, Wesley Sinclair
My Grandmas

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Table of Contents

CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION 1
PRESPYTERIAN HISTORY VIEW 7
COMMUNITY VIEW
LAND VIEW
GOVERNMENT/EDUCATION/MEDIA VIEW
BIRTH OF A NATION 9
THE BIBLE SPEAKS
THE TRAMPHANT PATH GOD, GRANDMA, MOM & ME

CHAPTER 2
PRELIMINARY ANALYSIS 15
THE ANCESTORS SPEAK
CHALLENGE STATEMENT.....16
PROBLEM ANALYSIS…….15
DISCERN THE CHALLENGE.....16

CHAPTER 3
PLAN OF IMPLEMENTATION 20
JOURNEY TO LOVE 22
JOURNEY HOME.....35

CHAPTER 4
IMPLEMENTATION
JOURNEY TO LOVE
JOURNEY HOME

CHAPTER 5
RESEARCH QUESTIONS 43
BIBLICAL 43
HISTORICAL.....47
THEOLOGICAL 55
ORGIN OF LOVE 56
SOCIAL 65
SARAH ANN 69

CHAPTER 6
MINISTERIAL COMPENTENCIES.....73
CULTURAL AWARENESS
RELIGIOUS/SPIRITUAL EDUCATOR

PROPHETIC AGENT

CHAPTER 7
LOVE NEVER ENDS
THE JOURNEY CONTINUES

APPENDIXES
APPENDIX A: DEMONSTRATION PROJECT PROPOSAL 88
APPENDIX B: PROJECT TIMELINE 137
APPENDIX C: BUDGET 138
APPENDIX D: LOVE IN ACTION 149
APPENDIX E: THROUGH THE HOPE OF OUR ANCESTORS.....140
APPENDIX F: A THEOLOGY OF LOVE SURVEY 144
APPENDIX G: THE JOURNEY TO LOVE ANNOUNCEMENT 146
APPENDIX H: THE JOURNEY TO LOVE OUTLINE 147

BIBLIOGRAPHY 148

CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

Presbyterian Historical View[1]

In the heart of midtown Elizabeth, Union County, believed to be the first house of worship and oldest English-speaking church in New Jersey, is Siloam-Hope First Presbyterian Church (SHFPC)[i] formerly known as First Presbyterian Church, located at 14-42 Broad Street. Black congregants were required to worship in the balcony as Euro-Americans honored their God below, refusing to acknowledge the Blacks their humanity.

However, SHFPC has a history of sociopolitical, social justice and community involvement. The church traces its roots to the founding of the city of Elizabeth, Union County, New Jersey in 1664 and is one of the oldest most historic sites operating and serving the community for over 350 years.[2] This significant heritage started when a group of male European settlers known as the Associates, mainly Puritans from Long Island, Connecticut and Massachusetts, signed a treaty with Native American Indians to establish Elizabethtown and the State of New Jersey in 1664.[3] These Caucasian men depended upon an enslaved African labor force to work their estates. Additionally, the Associates along with their families were encouraged to bring servants and slaves with the intent to increase value to their land.[4] This was

[1] Harry C. Ellison, *Church of the Founders of New Jersey: The First Presbyterian Church of Elizabeth 1664 – 1964, 2nd Edition* (Elizabeth, NJ: 2012).

[2] Crossroads Signage Unveiled in Elizabeth, November 12, 2019, Crossroads signage unveiled in Elizabeth - YouTube (accessed April 27, 2021).

[3] Harry C. Ellison, *Church of the Founders of New Jersey: The First Presbyterian Church of Elizabeth 1664 – 1964, 2nd Edition* (Elizabeth, NJ: 2012), 1-13.

[4] Ethel M. Washington, *Black America Series: Union County Black Americans* (Arcadia Publishing: Charleston, SC: 2004), 7.

the economic stimulus package granted during that time to populate and develop the community. For example, settlers were given an additional 150 acres for each slave.[5] Religiously, the Associates were protesters who rejected the church of England due to the matter of unalienable rights. These revolutionary leaders believed in humans' natural rights coming directly from God rather than the Church or King. They also believed the Church was corrupt and needed purification. One such leader and experienced church builder, John Ogden, established his family bible, which is currently located at SHFPC.

The initial church building was constructed in 1668 four years after the Associates arrived and the site played a historic role in the formation of the United States of America by serving as a strategic battleground during the Revolutionary War time period, 1775 through 1783. At the time, the pastor and congregation were heavily interested and connected to the War of Independence. James Caldwell, a well-known minister, was a passionate leader on the fight for independence. Known as the fighting parson, Caldwell was armed with a loaded gun on the pulpit while he preached. Unfortunately, both Caldwell and his wife Hannah did not survive the war; they were killed in separate incidents as a result of the war. First Hannah was shot to death with the youngest of their nine children in her lap while they were in the parsonage.[6] She must have been an honorable woman because her death is still portrayed on the Seal of the County of Union, New Jersey with the inscription, "The death of Hannah Caldwell".[7] A year later, her husband, James was also shot to death and according to report, his funeral was one of the most

[5] Ibid.

[6] Harry C. Ellison, *Church of the Founders of New Jersey: The First Presbyterian Church of Elizabeth 1664 – 1964, 2nd Edition* (Elizabeth, NJ: 2012), 84.

[7] Ibid, 82.

dignified scenes that the town has ever witnessed.[8] The original stone slats of their tombstone are set into the wall of the center narthex of the Church.[9]

The original edifice was attacked and burned by British troops in 1780; however, the church was rebuilt six years later. During the 1800's, the church provided social missions specifically for their segregated African worshipers and offered educational, abolitionist, and Underground Railroad services. The balcony seatings set apart for the African congregants is still visible at SHFPC.

On the SHFPC campus are also two prominent landmarks associated with the church. The first is the church's graveyard, also known as Old First Cemetery, the resting place for New Jersey's founding families and Revolutionary War soldiers; according to the church's website.[10] Buried along with these dignitaries are freed and enslaved African ancestors. With over 2,000 headstones dating from the late 1600s to 1917, visitors are able to take a walking tour of the burial ground and see who is laid to rest there as well as when they were buried. However, there are currently 313+ unmarked African ancestors' graves which need to be remembered.[11] Consequently, The 313+ Ancestors Speak Research Project https://313ancestorsspeakproject.org was established. By the way of a $250,000 capital fundraising initiative, a monument in honor of these unidentified ancestors was meticulously designed and crafted by a well-known local artist. With the mystical Sankofa bird majestically on top of the monument, there are the facial images of four ancestors, one on each side, 313 embedded on the shape of Africa and 381 names listed on all four sides. These twenty feet plus granite monument stands tall on a circular base

[8] Ibid, 87.

[9] Ibid.

[10] Siloam Hope First Presbyterian Church (shfpchurch.org) (accessed April 27, 2021).

[11] Ibid.

with the inscription "In Honor Of Our Ancestors." It is erected in the Caldwell Place side of the cemetery. The monument was unveiled in a ceremony on Sunday, June 18, 2023, in a grand and historic style. This historic occasion began with honoring and remembering the past with rituals of prayer and a wreath ceremony at the Veterans Memorial Waterfront. The glorious occasion was celebrated as thousands of people lined the streets including children, youths, elders, and families. The diversity of the community was evidenced by the sounds of a multiplicity genre of music, beats of the drum, rhythms of the dance, and the smell, and taste of food. It was a parade the people longed for after COVID-19. The spirit of One Love and the unity of the moment was visible. At the closing ceremony on SHFPC's campus, it was the children who were at the first circle at the foot of the monument during the moment of unveiling, symbolic of embracing the future. A mission of love and unity was accomplished as the partnership of over twenty organizations established this Juneteenth Collective 1865 initiative. June 1865 signifies the year enslaved individuals in Galveston, Texas found out they were freed after the Civil War had ended, two years later than when the Emancipation Proclamation was ordered by Present Abraham Lincoln on January 1, 1863.

The second landmark is the historic Old Academy School building, also known as Snyder Academy of Elizabethtown, which was originally SHFPC's parish house. This educational institution schooled prominent young men and America's founding fathers such as Alexander Hamilton who became the country's first Secretary of Treasury, and Aaron Burr, the third vice president.[12] Currently Snyder Academy functions as a center for cultural education, history, museum, art, and socioeconomic development. The institution's mission is to engage and

[12] Genine Babakian, *"Faith and Leadership: How Can the Church Participate in Antiracism Work?"* Faith and Leadership, Duke University (November 24, 2020), A merged congregation bonds over a project to honor the freed and enslaved Africans buried in its cemetery | Faith and Leadership (accessed April 27, 2021).

embrace the community's needs and increase the public's knowledge of the United States of America's history by telling the story of the people of New Jersey from 1664 through the American Revolution.[13] Princeton University, known to be one of the oldest higher educational institutions, was also birthed on this campus. Jonathan Dickinson, the first Senior Minister at the church, founded the College of New Jersey as a Presbyterian College in 1746.[14] After a brief relocation to Newark, the college was moved to Princeton in 1896, and officially renamed Princeton University.

Along with these landmarks, SHFPC is a key stop for the city of Elizabeth's "Four Centuries in a Weekend" celebratory tour. This annual tourism event features reenactments of historical events such as the Battle of Springfield, where the British army was finally overpowered in the attempt to gain New Jersey during the Revolutionary War. As a result, there are many monuments in Elizabeth which symbolize the American Revolutionary War. In fact, Elizabethtown has bragging rights to be the site where the first American President, George Washington, left by boat to go to his inauguration to Manhattan, New York in 1789. To further fortify SHFPC's historically significant and deep Revolutionary War heritage, on November 4, 2019, philanthropic organizations, along with elected officials, unveiled two historic interpretive signs located outside the Church and burial grounds on Broad Street.[15]

Community View[16]

[13]The Snyder Academy of Elizabeth, https://www.goelizabethnj.com/directory/the-snyder-academy-of-elizabethtown (accessed April 27, 2021)/

[14] Harry C. Ellison, *Church of the Founders of New Jersey: The First Presbyterian Church of Elizabeth 1664 – 1964, 2nd Edition* (Elizabeth, NJ: 2012), 50.

[15] Crossroads signage unveiled in Elizabeth - YouTube (accessed April 27, 2021).

[16] U.S. Census Bureau QuickFacts: Elizabeth city, New Jersey (accessed April 27, 2021).

According to American history, Elizabethtown's historic importance originated from the first British settlement into a colony and then the state of New Jersey. Based on the 2010 United States Census the population of Elizabeth, New Jersey is 124,969. It is the fourth largest city in New Jersey after Newark, Jersey City and Paterson. Geographically across over twelve miles, Elizabeth has a population density of 10,144.4 people per square. The city's demographic makeup is mainly Hispanic/Latino at 65%; White at 41.5%; and Black at 19.5% while female population is 49.8%. The age range is as listed below:

- Under 5 = 7.9%
- Under 18 = 26.9%
- Over 18 years and under 65 = 56.8%
- 65 years and over = 10%

While 73.4% of Elizabeth's residents graduated from high school, only 13.5% have a bachelor's degree or higher. People with disability under sixty-five is 6.7% while 22.7% have no health insurance. The median household income is $48,407 with a poverty rate of 17.6%. The employment rate is 68% and residents work in wholesale sales. Interestingly minorities are listed as owning the majority of the businesses (7,727), then men (6,524) at second and women third at 4,105. Home ownership is 24.2% with a median value of $282,700 and a mortgage of $2,519 monthly. Renters pay $1,152 monthly while 57% of the residents have difficulty paying their rent.

Land View[17]

The rich history of SHFPC paved the way for the location to be the mid\uptown main commercial district area. This historic locality also has several houses of worship, Ritz Theatre, Art Deco Hersch Tower and Thomas Jefferson Arts Academy. The antique styles houses are

[17] *Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia*. Elizabeth, New Jersey - Wikipedia (accessed April 27, 2021).

well maintained and there are unique ethnic restaurants, bars, and stores throughout the community.

Elizabeth is a hub for several major roadways: New Jersey Turnpike/Interstate 95; Interstate 278\ (Goethals Bridge which spans Arthur Kill to Staten Island, Route 1-9, Route 27, Route 439 as well as public transportation: NJ Transit Rail/Bus, Newark/Elizabeth Rail Link, and Union County Light Rail. Furthermore, the railroads make connections to Newark Liberty International Airport, and there are private bus services to JFK Airport in New York. There is also the Elizabeth Marina which is active all year long with activities such as ethnic festivals and holiday events.

Government\Education\Media View[18]

The local government consists of a mayor and nine city council members. New Jersey is a Democratic State and as part of the eighth congressional district and twentieth legislative district, currently all of their elected officials are members of the Democratic Party.

Elizabeth's police department was established in 1858, five years before the Emancipation Proclamation and thirteen years after the fire department was formed in 1837. There are over 360 police officers, nine captains, twenty-one lieutenants and thirty-nine sergeants. The fire department is also responsible for Emergency Medical Services.

Educationally the city provides schooling from pre-kindergarten through 12th grade. There are three branches of libraries. There are several private schools and notably Princeton University.

[18] Ibid.

From 1779 through 1992 the Daily Journal was published in Elizabeth and WJDM at 1530 was broadcast from 1970 through 2019. News 12 New Jersey offers news and weather for the city.

Birth of a Nation

August 6, 1962, one hundred and eighty-six years after the United States of America acquired independence from the Kingdom of Britain and the Declaration of Independence was adopted by the Continental Congress, the Caribbean Island of Jamaica West Indies was decolonized from the monarch. After three centuries of British governmental rulership, Jamaica became the first of the British West Indies Islands to receive her liberation.[19] The lowering of the red, white, and blue was replaced with black, green, and gold. Jamaica became a nation of multiplicity racial roots united in a liberating and joyous time of celebration. The motto "Out of Many One People "symbolic of the diversity and unity of the people is represented in the Coat of Arms. "*Forward March*" by Derrick Morgan, a patriotic call for unity in a homeland that had been given the responsibility of managing her affairs, was the song of declaration for the occasion. *The time has come, give joy and praise, the Lord is still with you. Gather together, be brothers and sisters, we're independent.* People were dancing in the street to the rhythm of the beat; parades, shows and games filled the atmosphere for this national independence holiday. For two weeks, over 30,000 people from around the world, including dignitaries from Africa, Europe, and America, celebrated the birth of a new nation, Jamaica, the land we love.[20] The national anthem is a prayer calling on God's blessing, protection, wisdom, justice, and love.[21]

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[19] Jamaica Independence, 1962 | The National Library of Jamaica (nlj.gov.jm) (accessed April 2021).

[20] Ibid.

[21] Eternal Father bless our land ... (Jamaican National Anthem) (worldprayers.org) (accessed April 2021).

Eternal Father bless our land
Guard us with Thy mighty hand
Keep us free from evil powers
Be our light through countless hours
To our leaders, Great Defender,
Grant true wisdom from above
Justice, truth be ours forever
Jamaica, land we love
Jamaica, Jamaica, Jamaica, land we love.

Teach us true respect for all
Stir response to duty's call
Strengthen us the weak to cherish
Give us vision lest we perish
Knowledge send us, Heavenly Father,
Grant true wisdom from above
Justice, truth be ours forever
Jamaica, land we love
Jamaica, Jamaica, Jamaica, land we love.

As the beautiful Caribbean Island of Jamaica was celebrating her birth of independence, Ena Sinclair was in travail, pregnant and giving birth. The fetus in her womb moved forward down the birth canal, rhythmically joining in the celebration of liberation. Primrose "Yvette," the first rose of Ena & Wesley' seven children, was born into a social scenery of splendor, freedom, and jubilee. Primrose was one of the two hundred plus babies born on Monday, August 6, 1962, in Jamaica, and to receive a special gift of a silver spoon, a symbol of love, respect and honor for new birth.

God, Grandmas, Mom, and Me

In the 1960s many Jamaicans emigrated to Britain, United States of America, and Canada for socioeconomic reasons. This included my parents. My dad, Wesley Sinclair, migrated to Britain before I was born in 1962 and my mom journeyed to the United States two years later, in 1964. As a result of my parents' migration in quest for a better quality of life for the family, my siblings and I were left in the care of our grandmothers and extended family members. We called my maternal grandfathers Uncle Bobby and Brother Parrish. Uncle Bobby was an agriculturist

and Brother Parrish a traveling evangelist. John Sinclair, my paternal grandfather had died 1958, before I was born. He was a cultivator, and as the story goes, John's father was a slave owner who freed him and gave him land and horses. His father was one of three Sinclair brothers of Scottish descendent who traveled to Jamaica as missionaries. The Scottish established the Presbyterian Church in Jamaica which later merged with other churches to become United Church of Jamaica and Cayman Island.[22] Goshen Presbyterian Church at Lucky Hill in St. Mary has an engravement of the Sinclair as a memorial. However, we were raised on grandmothers' theology, a way of discipline and communal love.

My relationship with God began as a child where my grandmothers: Adassa Walters (maternal) "Aunt Mamie" and Lolita Brady (paternal) "Meme," instilled within me the spiritual disciplines of daily bible reading, prayer, fasting, studying, meditation, solitude, service, and corporate worship. These spiritual practices are the path to my spiritual growth, and they help to develop my transformative relationship with God.[23] This transformation challenges and empowers me to live a purposeful lifestyle of love. Prayer for example was the first act and last acts of the day. As I arose at sunrise early in the morning, I gave God thanks. As I kneeled down at nights to pray, I asked God for protection and guidance. At grandma's bedside, on bended knees, eyes closed, hands in praying position, I prayed the popular traditional 18th century children's prayer, *now I lay me down to sleep I pray the Lord my soul to keep. If I should die before I wake, I pray to God my soul to take. If I should live for another day, I pray to*

[22] United Church in Jamaica and the Cayman Islands | World Council of Churches (oikoumene.org) (accessed, 2021).

[23] Richard J. Foster, *Celebration of Discipline: The Path to Spiritual Growth*, rev. ed. (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1988), 7.

the Lord to guide my ways. God Bless momma, papa, etc. Amen. Additionally, memorization of scriptures such as the 23rd Psalm, the Lord is my Shephard, I shall not want, was a daily practice.

These divine values were further taught to me by my mother and resonate in my soul to this day. Like her mother, my mom is a prayer warrior and a disciplined and respectful daughter of God who although an Ordained Elder in the Presbyterian Church, prefers the role of the hospitality/usher ministry, which she is currently doing at the age of 80+ in retirement in Jamaica West Indies. Mom's prayer time is 5:00am where every day she starts out by reading the Bible, meditation, reflection, and prayer. She prays for her children, grandchildren, family, friends, neighbors, leaders, and everyone. This spiritual ritual is ingrained in her children's DNA and although we are living in different countries and time zones, technology allows us to speak and see each other regularly. For over four years now, Mom, her children, grandchildren, and sometime others meet by the way of Zoom, daily at 9:00pm EST. This daily habit is a space for generational engagement especially for Mom to collaborate with her children and grandchildren. We taught Mom how to use the digital platforms Zoom and Facebook. Now, she is efficient at using technology for virtual churches and keeping up with current affairs. Mom's silent prayers touch the heart of God and move mountains. It was Mom's relationship with God that allowed her to leave her homeland and journey to the foreign land of the United States of America in the 1960s. A land with strange food, customs and culture which had her eating crackers and drinking tea. She worked for several years and accumulated enough funds to bring to America her six (6) children and husband too. Her sister, brothers and many other family members came to the country through her generosity. My mother is a phenomenal woman communicated by Maya Angelou. Ena is the Proverbs 31 woman! There never seems to be any lack in her household and she has a generous heart that gives abundantly. Moreover, it was due to mom's

fervent prayers that her son was released from prison after 25 years. Nevertheless, this God is the God of my foremothers.

Through these phenomenal women, a spirit of love transcended to the ministry of support wherever they resided. Aunt Mamie was a quiet and reserved United Methodist, but her powerful presence was evident in her silence. The traditional hymns and Psalms were her favorite inspirations. "Be not dismayed whatever betide, God will take care of you, beneath His wings of Love abide, God will take care of you. Through every day all the way." We, the family, sang grandma's hymn at her funeral. However, Meme was the opposite. Her mouth was boisterous and powerful as she praised her God. She was a founding member of Emmanuel Faith Church of God in St. Mary, a holiness, hand clapping, dancing, and shouting church in Jamaica West Indies. She was known for her passion for God, family, and God's people as she baked and cooked for the community. She did not like no "dead church" and one of her favorite sayings was "fire fi you," meaning you are going to hell if you don't change your ways. Through my maternal lineage, I experienced the formalities of Methodist, Presbyterian, and Fire Baptizing Holiness spiritual traditions of God the Father. I often sense the presence of my grandmothers with me.

The Bible Speaks

Although I grew up in the church, like most youth and Millennials these days, I also strayed. The God of my fore parents and the Church was boring and did not interest me. I traded the spiritual virtues for another lifestyle experience. But even during those moments, God was with me, protecting me from dangers seen and unseen, as well as providing for my every need. For this reason, I utterly understand why some youths of today opt out of organized religion. Nevertheless, in my late teens I became self-aware of the significance and sacredness

of the Holy Bible, God's inspired word, based on an important life experience similar to Moses' burning bush discourse in the third chapter of Exodus. I was in college at the time and one afternoon I returned to a home destroyed by fire. However, two miraculous things happened from this incident. First, my young niece who was home at the time of the fire was not harmed. The fire respondents found her hiding behind a refrigerator. She was frightened, but not injured in any way. God protected her from the fire. Secondly, my mother's Holy Bible (Concordance Revised Standard Version, A.J. Holman Company, 1962), which was on her night table in her bedroom, was totally protected from the fire. The room was on fire, but like the flames of fire from within the bush, the fire did not consume the Bible. Everything around the Holy Bible was damaged, but the Holy Bible survived without a burn or watermark. Needless to say, I was amazed of this theophany and will forever reverence the Bible because the Bible speaks.

The Triumphant Path

The Bible speaks Love as I sought guidance for my son and myself. As we walk in the Spirit and not according to the desire of humanity's sinful nature, the flesh, the Bible provides guidance. The Bible spoke, Jesus is the way when I asked for direction on how to live -- Love is the way. This is the message I preached when I received a Ministerial License in 2017. *"Today, I offer this path for living to all who will receive it, walk in the Spirit. The Spirit represents God Almighty. When you walk in the Spirit, you are walking with God; you are putting God first in all things; you are listening to God; you are obedient to God's will, and you cultivate a love relationship with the God of Love. You are walking in Love – Love is the foundation of a triumphant path. If you are in an indecisive state, reclaim your identity and get into a relationship with the Spirit of God, the God of unconditional Love. Once you are connected with Love, just keep walking, keep focus, and do not be distracted by the desires of the flesh. Deny the flesh by committing yourself to spiritual disciplines daily. The triumphant life is walking in*

*the path of Love evidenced by the manifestation of the fruit of the spirit. Jesus Christ, the Son is the only way to get to the Living God, which leads to the triumphant path, a life of identity and God's Love. The triumph*ant path *is Love."* [24]

[24] Primrose Sinclair Hammond, "A Triumphant Path" (Preached, AgapeFest, 2017).

CHAPTER 2
PRELIMINARY ANALYSIS

"Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength. Love your neighbor as yourself. There is no commandment greater than these." Mark 12:30 & 31b NIV

"… The only thing that counts is faith expressing itself through love." Galatians 5:6b

Ancestors Speak

SHFPC is a landmark with a heroic and historical history of laboring for America's independence from the British Empire. The story of European men purchasing land from Native Indians and using enslaved Africans to work the land is well documented. However, although the history of the European church members is known, the Africans' is not. Who were these 313+ souls buried in the churches' graveyard and why are the graves unmarked? Now under the leadership of the current pastor, Reverand Dr. Wanda Lundy, the 313+ Ancestors Speak Project has been established to honor these free and enslaved African Americans buried on SHFPC's Old First Cemetery grounds. She believes she is at SHFPC for such a time as this because the ancestors want to be remembered.[25] Could it be that the stirring of the ancestors is causing a reverberation for equality and justice ignited with "Black Lives Matter" and other social justice movements. Likewise, I know the Spirit of the ancestors led me to the 313+ Ancestors Speak Research Project in search of a Theology of Love. A meaning of love beyond the graveyard into eternity.

[25] Genine Babakian, *"Faith and Leadership: How Can the Church Participate in Antiracism Work?"* Faith and Leadership, Duke University (November 24, 2020), A merged congregation bonds over a project to honor the freed and enslaved Africans buried in its cemetery | Faith and Leadership (accessed April 27, 2021).

Challenge Statement

As an Educational Research Theologian on the 313+ Ancestors Speak Research Project located in Elizabeth, New Jersey, I became aware of free and enslaved Africans and African Americans buried in unmarked graves from 1766 - 1914. The Declaration of Independence promised "life, liberty, and happiness" in life or death. I believe this is the ultimate act of love. This promise was not fulfilled. This demonstration project will develop a "Theology of Love" and create an educational model focusing on honoring the forgotten while strengthening family and community relationships.

DISCERNING THE CHALLENGE - Sankofa

A people without the knowledge of their past history, origin and culture is like a tree without roots. (Marcus Mosiah Garvey. 1887 – 1940)

The challenge is established on the ethical matter of love. During the world health crisis of Covid-19 and social injustice pandemic, a theology of love moved me towards a quest for love, echoing "Love Matters". Certainly, this is a fascinating journey since love is such a complex and irrational behavior that is experienced differently by people. I had a Sankofa moment, to go back in search of my roots in order to move forward on a dissertation on love. Sankofa, a mythological bird with its head turned backwards, and feet firmly planted forward, is a West African expression from the Akan tribe in Ghana.[26] The literal translation of the word and the symbol is "*it is not taboo to fetch what is at risk of being left behind*".[27] The word derived from the words: SAN (return); KO (go) and FA (look, seek and take). [28] The Sankofa symbolizes the Akan people's quest for knowledge among the Akan with the implication that the

[26] Berea Collage, Black Cultural Center. The Power of Sankofa: Know History - Berea College (accessed December 19, 2023).

[27] Ibid.

[28] Ibid.

quest is based on critical investigation, intelligent and persistent examination.[29] The past serves as a guide for planning the future. To the Akan, it is this wisdom in learning from the past which ensures a strong future. Thus, the knowledge and lessons of the past must never be forgotten and are to be used to advance the future. What past wisdom regarding love needs to be built on for the future? In the words of Dr. Chanceller James Williams, best known for his book, *Destruction of Black Civilization, "*there can be no real identity with our heritage until we know what our heritage really is. It is all hidden in our history, but we are ignorant of that history. We have been floating alone, basking blissfully in the sunny heritage of other peoples."[30] In other words, this is a matter of identity. It is essential to know one's origins in order to know oneself.

Love In Action

At first, this love pursuit directed me to a graveyard at the Siloam-Hope First Presbyterian Church (SHFPC) in Elizabeth, New Jersey. I was first invited to take part in ACTS, Authentic Communities Transforming Spiritually Bible study, a study in the Books of Acts – Actions of the Early Church in a twelve-week session. A group leader was needed for the action of *love* which aligned with my theology of love project. So, I facilitated the last session entitled "Love in Action" based on the pericope of scripture in Acts 26:19-23. The one hour zoom session was a time of sharing, learning, and reflecting. In an Imaginative Circle of Love discussion participants were requested to keep in mind our current unprecedented environment. Imagine you are a journalist like the writer Luke, and you are on assignment to record an accurate story of the current state of the church. 1. What story would you tell? 2. Who would be

[29] Ibid

[30] African Warrior Scholars, Chancellor Williams Biography | African Warrior Scholars (african-warrior-scholars.com).

your featured character(s) and why? 3. How would your story transform lives and encourage future generations? 4. How will you demonstrate Love in Action during this season?

The session ended with reflections, music, and dance to the reggae rhythm of Marley's "One Love."

The unnamed deceased are children, women, men -- families from a diverse age range, 0 through 103 according to the church's burial book from a period of 1776 through 1914. But why are these graves without a marker to identify the family members? Is there a hidden mystery yet to be revealed? These are some of the questions "What's the 313+ The Ancestors Speak" initiative is investigating with a mission to honor these unknown families. A weekly Video Blog, What's the 313? The Ancestors Speak was established. Through awareness and fundraising the hope of erecting a memorial was realized on June 18, 2023, in the unveiling of a magnificent artistic monument. In a collaborative effort of love, "The Juneteenth Collective 1865" was created to celebrate and honor the rich heritage of African Americans. This important event featured a parade through the streets of Elizabeth, New Jersey. With over 35 participating groups and floats, the grand march started with a wreath ceremony at the Veteran Memorial Waterfront Park. Leading the parade were the descendants of Henry P. VanDeveer, whose face is featured on the monument along with the Mayor and other dignitaries. The lawn on Snyder Academy was open for the children who had their own entertainment including ice cream and other treats. After the grand procession and unveiling, the community continued this auspicious occasion in the fellowship of love with food, music, and dancing in the streets. During this time, I was also able to engage the community with "A Theology of Love: A Sankofa Model Survey."

> The Juneteenth event was the coming together of the community! From the Mayor's Office down to the entire town of Elizabeth, New Jersey gathered tighter in celebration of freedom. Freedom of expression dancing to the rhythm of freedom! Freedom. From the waterfront to the graveyard freedom! The children are playing, the music is playing, the drummers are playing, the dancers are

> dancing, the singers are singing freedom, Freedom! One heart, One heart, One mind, One community! The Ancestors call for unity! Why we must come together now! The unveiling of a monument in honor of the Ancestors who walked before us*!*[31]

While engaging in the 313+ Ancestors Speak project, I was inspired to learn more about my family ancestry. I recognized the connection from the continents of Africa, Europe, and Americas – Ghana West Africa, Jamaica West Indies, and the United States of America New York/New Jersey. So, this project was initially a retrospective journey to an era of colonialization in search of "A Theology of Love." A love voyage that invoked the question, why look for the living among the dead? This inquiry stirred up the hope of the ancestors' love of family. A love to be resurrected. A love that empowers and transforms lives. A love that learns and remembers family stories and rituals.

Why look for the living among the dead? This was the question I proposed during a sermon I presented to the audience at New York Theological Seminary during a Mentoring for Thriving in Ministry seminary entitled "Through the Hope of our Ancestors." After Jesus Christ was executed and buried, it was important that Jesus receive the proper burial ritual as demonstrated in the resurrection story found in the Gospels (Matthews 28:1-6; Mark 16:1-6; Luke 24:1-8; John 20:1). It was noted that early in the morning, women Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary, and other women went searching for Jesus' body carrying the burial spices they had prepared. Similar to Jesus Christ our Prototype and Great Ancestor, these 313+ ancestors needed honorable entombment.

[31] Primrose Sinclair Hammond's Journal Entry. June 18, 2023.

CHAPTER 3
PLAN OF IMPLEMENTATION

Goals, Strategies and Evaluations

A Theology of Love: A Sankofa Model research project strives to determine how meaning is made through the discovery process that identifies transformative occurrences focused on the values, beliefs, and cultural settings of the 313+ Ancestors Speak Research Project. This active research project endeavors to establish a communal understanding of a theology of love as it relates to the Declaration of Independence promised of life, liberty, and happiness in life or death. The discipline and practice of research methodology were utilized inclusive of creating a narrative that is built upon. Ultimately an educational model focusing on honoring the forgotten while strengthening family and community relationships is established.

Goal 1: Awareness Raising -- To introduce, define, and describe the 313+ Ancestors Speak Research and A Theology of Love Projects with the intention to help people understand the related issues.

The first strategy was to determine the demographic to target for a comprehensive analysis utilizing the African and European descendants of the people buried in the Old First Cemetery as well as the community of Elizabeth, New Jersey.

The second strategy was to create and implement a survey. Design questions for the questionnaire regarding A Theology of Love, the impact of the 313+ free and enslaved Africans buried in unmarked graves. This includes questions raised in the challenge statement. Ensure questions to be clear, concise, and based on utilize an open response format to solicit response. Provide introductory information for respondents.

The third strategy was to analyze data to be utilized for the basis of examining shared and contrasting views. Report on the outcomes of the survey.

The fourth strategy was to be present in the community: walk the neighborhoods attend church services, volunteer, and other community events in order to establish and build relationships within the community as well as learn about the city.

Evaluation of Goal 1:

To get started on this journey a community engagement process was vital to understand the voice of the community. An ethnographic "A Theology of Love: A Sankofa Model Survey" (the "Survey") was conducted as a quick and efficient means for interactive interview and engagement in the process of discovery. One hundred individuals within the city of Elizabeth community were surveyed with the intent to bring awareness to "A Theology of Love: A Sankofa Model Project," the 313+ Ancestors Speak Research Project as well as provide data for the target audience. As an assessment tool the brief five questions survey served to measure the community's interest in engaging and supporting the project.

The application of the Survey was created online and administered by paper in person. The in-person approach provided an opportunity to personally build and establish relationships within the community. The framework for the Survey utilized the challenge statement through a qualitative methodology focused on gaining greater clarity of understanding of the challenge. An emphasis on life or death recognizing one's existence is an act of love. The participants of the survey were individuals who attended the Juneteenth Celebration, Elizabeth Port Block Party, and other social events within the community.

The Survey results identified 86% of the 100 participants were interested in supporting a platform for building loving relationships based on desiring to learn more through involvement. Two of the individuals who participated in the survey have ancestors buried in the graveyard.

The interested applicants were selected to participate as a focus group to engage in the next phase of the project, “The Journey to Love.”

The survey was analyzed validating the data such as contact information and prospective participants were contacted regarding the intent of the event. Multiple means of communication were used inclusive of email, text, and phone calls with further follow-up necessary to achieve a sufficient response.

To further build relationships, I became active in SHFPC community by participating in regular church worship services either in person or online. The church’s motto is “Welcome. Love. Service. Community”. Currently SHFPC is the only church in the state of New Jersey to have a picture displayed in Concourse A at Newark Liberty International Airport. (EWR) Terminal. I had the opportunity to participate in the unveiling of this grand event which was done in collaboration with Elizabeth Chamber of Commerce, Tourism Office. On display were the City of Elizabeth tourism kiosk, history starts here signages, 313+ Project and many more groups and organizations within the City of Elizabeth. The mayor and other elected officials were in attendance -- it was an engaging, fun, and impactful moment. The phrase “experience the unexpected, we’re not your average city” is befitting for the occasion.

I also engaged in weekly Bible Studies and social events. One Sunday afternoon after worship service, the Pastor and I were meeting in the sanctuary. The other congregates had left and we were the only individuals in the church building. While we were talking, I heard a sound as if footsteps. When we investigated, we saw a gentleman walking on the stairway towards the upper level when he saw us, to our surprise he held up a set of keys in his right hand and said, “I have the keys”. That was all he said and then he turned around and walked back down the stairs, through the doors and exited the building, just the way he entered. In a community with a large

unsheltered and mental illness population where at time people sleep in the church's graveyard, this gentleman had authority, access, and power to unlock the door. The door to our hearts. The door to Love. The door to the Church. The door to the Kingdom of Heaven.

Other events include strategic meetings with the City of Elizabeth officials in preparation for the Juneteenth Celebration, Elizabeth Destination Marketing Organization (EDMO) History Segment Meetings at City Hall of Elizabeth, Welcoming committee for the USS New Jersey Naval Officers for a site tour and the annual Four Centuries in a Weekend activities.

One day, I volunteered to assist at the Elizabeth Port Presbyterian Center's Food Pantry in Elizabeth, New Jersey. What I thought would be a one-day occurrence, turned out to be a twelve-week love adventure, traveling early mornings, 5:00am on the LIRR and New Jersey Transit. The center was implementing a new client intake process and needed help executing the operation. When I got to the site people were already waiting in a long line stretching over three blocks, some had come as early as 4:00am. Over 90% of the residents are of Spanish origin and don't speak or understand English. They are immigrants embarking economic opportunity, freedom, and an opportunity for a better lifestyle, similar to the Associates over 300 years ago. However, many are elderly or women with babies and young children, waiting for fresh and packed food. Snow, rain, or shine, about 300 people are there early waiting for assistance. Exhausted as I was on the New Jersey Transit train back home, as I was reflecting on the experience, the imagery of Jesus appeared to me, invoking the story of when Jesus saw the multitude and the needs of the people. Jesus' emotions enkindled compassion. (Matthew 9:36 & Mark 6:34). Jesus' love for humanity compelled Him to act. Likewise, reflection evoked a spirit of empathy within me, with a mission to help this economically disadvantaged community. The

workers were few and needed help. In this instance my reflection resulted in establishing new relationships and enhancing cultural awareness.

Goal 2: Develop Site Team (bringing the team together).

The first strategy is to recruit other people along the journey. The second strategy is to form and develop the team.

Evolution of Goal 2:

The formation of the initial site time was based on Canarsie Brooklyn location of which we conducted various strategic sessions. However, when the plot changed, it was necessary to reorganize the team. After a very thoughtful process and discernment, one person from the initial team continued working throughout the project. And others joined as a result of my building relationship in Elizabeth, New Jersey with SHFPC and the 313+ Ancestors Speak project.

Goal 3: Team Develop Project

The first strategy is weekly meetings on Tuesday at 7:00am. The second strategy is educational and to meet in person to tour the property. The third strategy is the development of the event, the fourth strategy is working with the team to advance the project.

Evaluation Goal 3: Brick Not The Cathedral -- Site Team Gathering

After coordinating with the team members and site coordinator, we had our first in person meeting on Friday afternoon, September 22, 2023. The site team met at SHFPC for a meet and greet which was important for team building. The meeting was enriching as the agenda included presentation and tour of the campus which included SHFPC, Old First Cemetery, 313+ Memorial and Snyder Academy; and visioning of the Challenge Statement. It was important for the team to be familiar with the project site. This gathering resulted in our "*A Brick Not the Cathedral*" brainstorming session with the vision of implementing a community event offered to community

residents. Key recurring words from the session were: identity, unity, humanity, ritual, celebration, healing, diversity/inclusion/equality, community, transformative, repeatable, and duplicable.

Key questions: What is it we want people to learn intergenerationally? How will the project speak to the humanity of people? This may seem to be a simple question, but what does love mean? How does love shows up? How do we help people embrace their identity? The response to these questions would begin to unlock the transformative potential in the life of the community. They would help to build a space for conversation on love. Something happens when people get together in person. We feel the vibration. This was the birth of "The Journey to Love." The team met weekly, Tuesday mornings at 7:00 virtually until the day of the event on Saturday, November 11, 2023.

Goal 4: Implementation of the project. Establish an educational model/program that effectively strengthens family and communal relationships and foster collaboration amongst diverse groups.

The first strategy is to implement "The Journey to Love". The second strategy is a trip to Ghana, West Africa to take a maquette of the monument to Africa, "take the ancestors back home".

CHAPTER 4
IMPLEMENTATION

The Journey to Love

"*Love is what we were born with. Fear is what we have learned here. The spiritual journey is the relinquishment or unlearning of fear and the acceptance of love back into our hearts. Love is the essential existential fact. It is our ultimate reality and our purpose on earth. To be consciously aware of it, to experience love in ourselves and others, is the meaning of love."*[32]

This Journy to Love event is the voice of the community regarding love. What is love? What's your expression of love? Finally, after weeks of meetings, phone calls, text messages and emails, a date was confirmed to have "The Journey to Love" at Snyder Academy. This experience demonstrated a characteristic of love, patience as a key to the answer to prayers. As an alternative we were considering using one of the many community centers which are more readily available. But it was important to have the event on SHFPC's campus at Snyder Academy, a community and culture center. It's the ideal spot due to the history, location, and accessibility of the property. Saturday, November 11, 2023, this day happened to also be "Veterans Day," a national holiday observed to remember Veterans who served in the Armed Forces of this nation, the United States of America. There are many revolutionary war veterans who are buried in the Old First Cemetery.

The work at hand: creating and printing brochures about the 313+ Ancestors Speak project; guest list, refreshments, treats, socks, decorations, unity vase, pickup up and transporting the labyrinth, technology, program, setting up, pulling down, hosting, etc. The site team plus ancillary members arrived early ready to work for "The Journey to Love" and to set the atmosphere. Synergistically we worked with Snyder Academy' staff to setup the seven stations, audio video technological and other areas in support of implementing the event. It was a

[32] Marianne Williamson, *A Return To Love, Reflections on the Principles of A Course In Miracles* (NY: HarperCollins, 2012), xx.

beautiful day; the sun was shining brightly, and the weather was nice, a wonderful day for The Journey to Love.

The "Journey to Love" is an individual yet collective path of transformation. It is a process that intersects with God, self, and others. The communal aspect is socially diverse and intergenerational. It is important for individuals to come and represent their expression of love. People were asked to bring artistic representation of love. How is love expressed individually and collectively? The occasion creates a space to engage in the art of love by way of rituals. The element of ritual allows us to connect with self, community, and Spirit. Seven pillars were established for creating a space for engaging in the "Journey to Love." These pillars are welcome, communion, remembrance, unity, movement, reflection, and benediction.

Bienvenido * Welcome * Akwaaba

Welcome is the first pillar in the Journey to Love, greeting people in a friendly and hospitable manner is an essential aspect of love. For the Ghanaian in West African, a Twi word Akwaaba is their official welcoming expression. Saying and being greeted with "Akwaaba" invokes a feeling of inclusivity and love. A welcoming heart sparks emotions and sets the stage as one enters the door into the Journey to Love. And so, not only are people being welcomed, but also the Spirit of God and the ancestors are invited in through the ritual of prayer. In his book on spiritual formation, Henri Nouwen describes prayer as, "standing in the presence of God with the mind in the heart"[33] This is a state of focus and unity, void of distractions and divisions, which creates full interconnection, oneness with God, self, others, and all of creation. "In the heart of God, the Spirit dwells, and there the great encounter takes place." In this great encounter as heart speaks to heart, there is love.

[33] Henri Nouwen, *Spiritual Formation: Following the Movements of the Spirit* (NY: HarperCollins, 2010), XVI.

Companerismo * Fellowship * Ayonkofa

The second pillar is communion and fellowship amongst each other. A space is made for conversation, breaking of bread and comradery. The Greeks use the word koinonia for fellowship and sharing. This aspect of love was demonstrated in the early church as believers were committed to fellowship, breaking of bread and prayer. The people joyfully gathered together "with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having the goodwill of all the people" (Acts 2:46b-47). Being in community is an essential aspect of love, especially for the purpose of neighborly love. It is within fellowship we see ourselves and realize we are one body in humanity. As Bishop Hezekiah Walker puts it, "we are all a part of God's body" and we need each other to survive.

For this event, individual gift bags which contained seasonal fresh fruits, chips, water, and other treats were available for participants. The communal representation of sharing was provided for all participants as an expression of love.

Recordar * Remember * Kae

The third pillar is to remember, there is wisdom in learning from the past history and traditions of our ancestors. How did our ancestors manage challenges and achievements? How did our ancestors love? Remembering the past informs the present and future. People must know and recall the stories of their ancestors. "If a race has no history, if it has no worthwhile tradition, it becomes a negligible factor in the thought of the world, and it stands in danger of being exterminated." Carter G. Woodson. When Moses was preparing the nation for his death and the crossing over into the promised land, all the people assembled to hear his final song in which he encouraged the people to "*Read up on what happened before you were born; dig into the past, understand your roots. Ask your parents what it was like before you were born; ask the old ones, they'll tell you a thing or two*" (Deuteronomy 32:7 MSG). Note: The Message version

of scripture is used for a more contemporary read. And after Moses declared the Shema (Deuteronomy 6:4-5), the prophet instructed the people to remember to love and to teach and encourage the next generations to love. "*Write these commandments that I've given you today on your hearts. Get them inside of you and then get them inside your children. Talk about them whenever you are, sitting at home or walking in the street; talk about them from the time you get up in the morning to when you fall into bed at night. Tie them on your hands and foreheads as a reminder; inscribe them on the doorposts of* your *homes and on your city gates*" (Deuteronomy 6:6-9). Remember, I remember preaching a message taken from this text entitled "Generations Need You!" at Bedford Central Presbyterian Church in Brooklyn, New York over 20 years ago. The invitation was extended by the Pastor and Mama Ivel Rose, my Mother's close friend) Mama Rose was like family and is now with the ancestors. It was at the Seniors' Fellowship event "Enjoying Our Walk with God" and the sermon encouraged the attendees, especially the seniors, to tell their stories and that would leave a legacy of love for future generations and also let them know that generations need them.

"Remind God of God's word, God's promises. God's word is comforting. God's word brings hope. God's word revives. God's word brings focus. God's word gives us joy and gives a melody to sing a rhythm to dance. Remember God's word and remind God of God's word. This remembering and recalling unlocks mysteries in our lives to understand and allow us to decode the mysteries in our lives that have been processed and stored in the past to help us now in the present and future." [34]

[34] Excerpts from Primrose Sinclair Hammond's Journal dated 6/29/21. A reflection on Psalms 119:49-56 shared with her Wednesday Mornings' Sister Circle.

The 313+ Ancestors Speak Monument was used as a symbol of remembrance as individuals were encouraged to walk to the monument. The history of the 313+ Ancestors Speak was talked about by the visionary leader. And a moment of silence was acknowledged in honor of military veterans. "The soldiers above all others pray for peace, for it is the soldiers who must suffer and bear the deepest wounds and scars of war" Douglas MacArthur (1880 – 1964).

Unidad * Unity * Biakoye

The fourth pillar is the decree to "love your neighbor as yourself" as a call to humanity in unity. Oneness is characterized by Jesus united with God, and Jesus' declaration that the Lord is one. This unity is the quality or state of being made one. Unity means working collectively as one body as the Psalmist declares it is a wonderful thing for people to gather in unity (Psalms 133:1). For the Apostle Paul walking in unity of the Spirit denotes there is one body and one Spirit. (Ephesians 4:1-6) Humankind is more than just body embodiment, and although we have separate bodies, we are spiritual beings created in the image and likeness of God, Imago Dei. We are God's vessel, God's hands, feet, and voice. However, we live in a physical world, and the ego's use of the body is to maintain the illusion of separation: the ego uses the body for attack, pleasure, and pride. On the other hand, the Holy Spirit, the spirit within us counteracts this deception of separation.[35]

This oneness is portrayed within the project site team members as "The Journey to Love" was being formulated and implemented. The team's constructive collaboration paved the way for a successful event. On the day of the event for instance, all team members showed up at the appointed time ready to work on the setting up. The 37-foot canvas labyrinth, a central element for the journey experience, needed to be set up, and according to the Holistic Health Services

[35] Richard Smoley, *The Theology of Love: Reimagining Christianity through A Course in Miracles (*VT: Inner Traditions, 2019), 187.

Wellness Consulting staff the approximate setup time is two hours. But, within one hour the tri-sectional labyrinth setup was completed due to the collaborative efforts of the team.

Another aspect of unity was represented by a sand ritual. The ritual began with individual participant's selection of sand colors from a multiplicity of choices displayed in various transparent containers. The diversity of the sand represented uniqueness found in people. Although the sand particles are separate and different in color, they are yet equal. Once a color is selected, the sand grains are poured out and unified into one container. This creation is a beautiful mosaic of oneness which is an act symbolizing the coming together of communities, families, or people in agreement, working together for a particular purpose. In this case, individuals within the community are in one accord making the decision to embark upon the "Journey to Love." Through this ritual, a unity sacramental experience was created as a path to a shared journey. The unity sacrament provides harmony, agreement, connection, identity, and oneness.

There are other rituals that symbolize unity such as the lighting of the Unity Candle during a wedding celebration which is a representation of two families uniting. Another unity ritual is the Overflowing Blessings which uses assorted color paint as a symbol of appreciation transformed into masterful art. The Ghanaians in West Africa embrace unity and community relationship in their traditional Asafosa Peace Ritual held at the Mamfe Ohum Festival. It is the coming together symbolizing unity in the form of palm wine. Palm wine is a traditional West African drink made from the sap of palm trees. Names of families and groups are represented on calabash containers containing palm wine then all the palm wine is mixed into a large container symbolizing the strength of togetherness and shared community spirit. This ritual is similar to the Holy Communion, the drink offering in remembrance of Jesus Christ.

Movimiento * Movement/Labyrinth * Akwantu

The fifth pillar is the aspect of movement through various forms and expressions. In my collection of iPhone photos there are two significant symbols that serve as encouragement as I take my regular walk within my community. Walking in and with Mother Nature provides a peaceful ecological environment to be amongst the trees, birds, and other species. I am one with nature and Spirit. One of my favorite locations to walk is the Brookside Preservative which includes Milburn Creek and walking trails in Nassau County, New York. As I journey along, I look forward to seeing a seabird standing on a pole situated within the water, with her head turned backward. For me, this imagery is a reminder of Sankofa moment of reflection. The second symbol which I encountered in the summer of 2023, is the engravement of LOVE along the walking trail. Someone wrote LOVE in large black writing in the middle of the path right above a crack going across the path. Similar to Bell Hooks' analogous experience of seeing graffiti as art on construction walls while walking, this art of writing love affirmation inspires and gives me hope. Yes, "public art can be a vehicle for the sharing of life-affirming thoughts."[36] The confirming idea is that love is always in the midst of our journey even when life seems to be broken and torn apart. Even when the morning is cold, frigid, and damp, the sun energy of love shines bright and warms the soul. Even in the midst of icy ground, the spark of love glows as if walking the path of glory. Even though the stream of water movement is motionless and slow, the rhythm of love inspires imagination and possibilities. How is love experienced? The kind gestures by the people along the way. The birds with their glowing red feathers, and the squirrels along the way, basking in the beauty of nature freely and joyously as they move to the rhythm of the day.

[36] Bell Hooks, *All About Love: New Versions*. (NY: William Morrow Paperbacks, 2009), xvii.

Then there are patches of love in the way. Love does not always show up the same way. Broken at times, messy at times, hidden at times, yet love is love. Evelyn and James Whitehead describe this feature of love as the shadows of eros, vital energy gone astray.[37] According to the Whiteheads, this vital energy of love exists throughout the world and animates all of creation. "It is the force that turns the flower to the sun, the energy that stirs human to be connected, to touch, taste and consume."[38]

The conceptual idea of the "Journey to Love" and birthing of the labyrinth experience began while journeying to Greece with my spouse. While there we visited the Archaeological Site Citadel of Mycenae in Greece. Situated at the main entrance of the sanctuary is "The Lion Gate," which is a segment of a cyclopean fortification. This colossal doorway is noted as the oldest monumental relief in Europe. I had an opportunity to walk the Grave Circle (1600 BCE) burial complex. Constructed with and surrounded by stones, this prehistoric royal cemetery architecture of rock carvings reminded me of a massive maze. While walking, I was reminded of the walk to Emmaus, wherein two travelers had an encounter with the resurrected Christ. This encounter resulted in a spiritual awakening for these travelers as they discerned the meaning of true love. The pattern of love is created through our encounters along the road of life. We experienced universal love by engaging with families throughout the world, Italy, Canada, Mexico, USA, and Scotland. In Athen when I engaged a taxi driver in conversation regarding ethnology, he quickly dismissed any notion regarding division stating everyone is Greek regardless of color or place of origin. We were pleased with his response but were surprised

[37] James D. and Evelyn Eaton Whitehead, *Holy Eros: Pathways to a Passionate God*, (New York: Orbis Books, 2009), 168.

[38] Ibid, 9.

based on our lived experiences of racial divide. Nevertheless, this walk is a meditative journey of forgiveness, justice, restitution, and assurance that love conquers all, love wins.

What is a labyrinth? According to The Labyrinth Society, a labyrinth is a meandering path, often unicursal, with a singular path leading to a center. Labyrinths are an ancient archetype dating back 4,000 years or more, used symbolically, as a walking mediation, choreographed dance, or site of rituals and ceremony. Labyrinths are tools for personal, psychological, and spiritual transformation, and also thought to enhance right brain activity. Labyrinths invoke metaphor, sacred geometry, spiritual pilgrimage, religious practice, mindfulness, environmental art, and community building.[39]

There are several types of labyrinths available in many forms and can be found in religious and cultural traditions worldwide. They are external, stationary and within public spaces and parks such as the one located at the Veteran Memorial Waterfront Park in Elizabeth, New Jersey and Jones Beach Park in Nassau County, New York. There are also portable labyrinths which are typically for internal use; they can be seen affixed on floors of church buildings, retreat sights or available for rent. A thirty-seven foot, three panel indoor canvas labyrinth was used for "The Journey to Love." The seven circuit classical seed pattern model came in three bags containing the front, center, and back sections to be put together utilizing Velcro. Putting it together was straightforward. Furthermore, the owner provided his webpage www.njholistichealthservices.com providing detailed historical, contextual, and archaeological information regarding the labyrinth tool.

Is there a right way to walk the labyrinth? Well, enter and follow the path, be present in the moment, connect with your inner spirit, find your rhythmic pace, and go. The journey flows

[39] The Labyrinth Society, The Labyrinth Society: The Labyrinth Society (accessed September 2, 2023).

in a circuitous route of in and out. The starting point is the path that leads to the center for a personal psychological and spiritual transformation. At the center point, one may be at an intersection asking for guidance regarding the way to love. But the same way in is the same way out -- there is only one way to the path of love.

Although the labyrinth walk is a personal journey, people can choose to travel alone, or couples, family, team, or community. Individuals can walk at their own space, pace, rhythm and interact with others or not. The site team walked the labyrinth as a team although individuals travelled at their own pace. To receive the full experience of the labyrinth, sufficient time must be allocated, and the process cannot be rushed. I entered first and the rest of the team followed along. As I was walking along the circular path at a steady pace at time, I stopped a few times and pondered, I felt a heavy weight on my back, was this the weight of love? As I approached the center, the weight was lifted, but I became anxious because it was 2:45 P.M. and guests were expected to arrive. But the energy within prompted me to wait. Hands on hips, I stood at the center as my husband sat in the center with legs crossed, hands folded at knees and head bowed in a posture of reflection. As he arose from the center together, we embraced in the center and sealed the journey with a kiss in agreement of love.

In the general gathering, the youths in attendance led the way to the journey of love as others followed; naturally, we waited on our elders to finish. This is symbolic of intergenerational connectiveness -- the strength of the youths and experience of elders as a way of life, as is mentioned in Proverbs 20. Once participants reached the center of the labyrinth, for the purpose of this event in the essence of time, participants moved out to the outside of the labyrinth until all completed the journey. Once completed, individuals were greeted by the ones waiting. The journey to love is a movement with the Spirit. It is a spiritual journey in pursuit of

self, community, and mission rather than of perfection. This love journey is a process which requires intentionality and daily reflective moments. The steps involve awareness, identifying conditioning, and following the subtle movements of the Spirit in our hearts and in our lives. When the human heart is open and responsive to the Spirit healthy movements occur, and love happens, unexpectedly and in many ways.[40]

Reflexion * Reflection * Asusuwso

The sixth pillar of reflection is captured upon completing the mediative circle and walk through the labyrinth. Created was a space for action reflection. A circle was formed as individuals shared their experience in community at the reflective circle. Reflection helps us to go deep within and remember what was erased from our memory. So, we can call into memory those things we cannot physically see as if they were. Reflection facilitates imagination of what could be. In his letter to the Corinthians, after outlining the characteristics for the excellence of love, Paul alluded that we don't see things clearly. We know or see poor reflections and indistinct images. "For now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then we will see face to face. Now I know only in part; then I will know fully even as I have been fully known." (1 Corinthians 13:12). Reflection, according to an article in Psychology Today is, "a deep, penetrating awareness. Its purpose is to help us go beyond traditional forms of thinking. A reflection practice often brings fresh insights, creative solutions, and new awareness to relationships. So, it's not so much what you reflect on, but how you bring a fresh and abiding awareness to any area of your life that matters"[41].

[40] Henri Nouwen, *Spiritual Formation: Following the Movements of The Spirit,* (NY: Harper Collins Publishers, 2010), 137.

[41] Donald Altman, "Reflection" *Psychology Today,* Reflect | Psychology Today (access, January 2024).

"The Journey to Love" provided the essence that was well received, said one participant. Amazing, how wonderful it is to be on The Journey to Love on Love's 22nd birthday celebration. This participant mother gave birth to a daughter given the name Love. As the mother of Love held a stone with the inscription LOVE 11/11/23, which was gifted as a memento, she expressed her thoughts of her journey. The mother of Love passionately shared words of appreciation for Love and her accomplishments despite health challenges. Mother Love reflected on the time of her pregnancy and subsequent birth to Love. Surely, Love was the response to a world in chaos as a result of the deadliest attack I've experienced, the tragedy of September 9, 2001. What a catastrophe? The government responded with a war on terrorism, but God's response was Love. As Reverand Al Green 's soulful lyrics on the transformative power of love in his 1979 song remind us, "The Message is Love". The message was Love, the message is Love and the message will always be Love. That's what I am dreaming of Love.

The reflective moment journeyed in the communal sense of family love, the joy of seeing a spiritual sibling's present and the memory of his embracing her and others in the spirit of Akwaaba when she visited the Motherland for the first time. A brother extending love by opening up his home is like an open heart, for home and community. He is the personification of Love. The reflective moment journeyed in marriage as a very excited spouse spoke highly of his wife of 28 years. The reflective moment journeyed to moments of togetherness and points of separation in life. Know that one is never alone, people in front, people behind, people all around. Revolution of the omnipresence and omniscience of God in Psalm 139 as David was asking for divine guidance. "You search out my path and my lying down and are acquainted with all my ways. Even before a word is on my tongue, O Lord, you know it completely. You hem me in, behind and before, and lay your hand upon me. Such knowledge is too wonderful for me; it is

so high that I cannot attain it." (Psalm 139:3-6) Individuals are at different paces, but are on the same journey of Love. At the homestretch, don't give up, keep on going. We are still here on the journey.

The reflective moment journeyed to walking with the Ancestors. Finding the way by the guidance of the Ancestors who have gone before us. The Ancestors who have paved the way for us. Grateful for the Great Cloud of Witness. Walking alone and collectively being comfortable and uncomfortable by pressing close due to space. The reflective moment journeyed on a walk, in nature and with nature.

The Voice of the Students – The Love of the Students

Artwork of students from the City of Elizabeth High School were highlighted as part of expression of love reflection. Special thanks to the youth leaders who came as representatives and displayed the students' artwork. Most notably is the exceptional creative painting conveying a grandmother's love, specifically designed for "The Journey to Love." It is created with warm pastel colors for love and purity. The image is of a grandmother in a wheelchair while a young girl, her granddaughter, kneels at her feet. Her head is resting firmly on grandma's lap, and both of their eyes are closed as if praying. The teenage girl is holding on tightly to the hem of her grandma's garment, reminiscent of the woman with the issue of blood touching the hem of Jesus' garment to be healed. And grandma's aged right hand has her pointer finger extended as if to have a mystical touch for the remedy of any situation.

This masterpiece reminded me of my maternal grandmothers and the lyrics of songwriter Bill Withers' "Grandma's Hands." Yes, Grandma used to issue out warnings, Grandma understands, Grandma picked us up each time we fell. Grandmas, thank you for being our guardians and eternally watching over us.

Bendicion * Benediction * Nhyira

The seventh pillar in the journey to love is a benediction. Take a pause in the journey for a moment of thanksgiving. Bless the people who have helped along the way. Bless the people who were present. Bless the Ancestors. Thank the Spirt of Love, God.

A Journey Back Home

I am in a state of expectation. expecting a dot to be connected, full circle closing a gap! What will Mother Africa tell me? I am connecting to the energy source, a spark of energy ignition! The power of expectation… What will I see in the Motherland? What will I learn in the Motherland? How shall I show up in Mother Africa? What are the lessons to be learned? What shall I offer? Keep an open mind. Stay Focused. Love is like a child playing in the field of life.[42]

On Wednesday, January 10, 2023, my husband, and I embarked on a fifteen-day pilgrimage to Ghana, West Africa. It was our first time visiting the Motherland, and we were excited. Our youngest son drove us to the airport for our 11:59PM direct flight from John F. Kennedy International Airport (JFK) to Kotoka International Airport in Accra, but before we left home, he made sure we prayed together. So, the three of us held hands in a circle and we prayed. He prayed for our safety, protection, guidance, and happiness. He prayed in the spirit of gratitude, thanking God and his parents. The group was a consortium of ten, representing the 313+ Ancestors Speak, SHFPC and New York Theological Seminary and sponsored and hosted by the Presbyterian Church of Ghana, Akuapem Presbytery. The main goal of the pilgrimage was to take a replica of the 313+ monument back home to Ghana, symbolic of taking the ancestors back home. But, were we taking the ancestors back home or were the ancestors taking

[42] Primrose Sinclair Hammond (Journal January 10, 2024).

us home? The ancestors took us back home as we connected with our African heritage and connected with new friends and family.

I did not sleep much on the ten-hour Delta flight. A Ghanaian gentleman, born on a Saturday, Mr. Kwame (the one who has the antidote) was sitting to the left of me. Identity is important in the African Diaspora, and the traditional baby naming process, "outdooring," is typically done eight days after a child is born. For the Akan and other ethnic groups, names are given according to the day of birth, which is a simple way for commonality within the culture. This naming ideology is similar to the sign of the zodiac used in the United States of America and other countries. African identity determines the day versus the month of when a person is born. My spiritual Akan name is Adwoa, female born on Monday with characteristic of peace. Kwame was traveling back home to take care of business. As we talked about ethnic foods such as banku and fufu, his advice to me was not to overeat because I don't want to get fat! Talk about being blunt. The packed flight was smooth, and when we reached our destination, we were five hours ahead in Ghanaian (GMT) time. Departing the plane and going through the entrance, the immigration process was simple. Our chief visionary and organizer provided a meticulously crafted itinerary. The first stop before going to our hospitality center was the Accra Mall. As we were in search of fabrics for funeral garments. To our amazement, as we were entering the mall, we saw Mr. Kwame waving at us.

Door of Return

From the moment we entered the land, we felt the spirit of Akwaaba. We were officially welcomed home through The Door of Return; home from where our ancestors were abducted over 400 years ago. We had returned home to reconnect, reimagine, restrengthen, reenergize,

reflect, and restore. We were dignitaries on an amazing pilgrim's journey of love, stepping into the rich Ghanian culture.

By the time we reached the hospitality center, it was evening time, and it was dark. We were hungry, and the eating spots were closed. After stopping at a few locations, our driver took us to a lodging place which seemed to be closed. However, we saw a car pulling up and two women exiting it. What we did not realize was, these women were carrying the food to prepare the meals for us. This wasn't fast food, but rather fresh authentic home cooked. Anyway, we were invited to dine under the shining moon and stars. As we sat around the table we talked and reminisced I couldn't help but look at the beautiful landscape. We were on top of the hill overlooking the city and was reminded of my childhood in Jamaica. It was as if I was at grandma's home on top of the hill in Fellowship Hall, St. Mary, overlooking the Caribbean Sea.

West African Traditional Religion regards death as transition from earthly life to spirit realm. Death is not the end of life, but is necessary in order to continue living as an ancestor. As a result, "death extends the family relationship into infinity, and the ceremonies and rituals performed by the living for the dead emphasize the unbroken family relationship between the living and the dead."[43] So, like Jesus Christ, the dead do not stay in the grave but transform, as spirit. Hence, Ghanaians reverence the dead, and as a result, funerals are a central part of their culture socially and spiritually. This is evident as large billboard posters honoring the dead are seen around the communities. The announcement includes photos, words of respect, dress code and itinerary for the celebration. On our third day in Ghana, we attended the pre-burial stage of a 52-year- woman's funeral. The beat of the drums resonated across the atmosphere of what was a lavish and elaborate affair for the entire community. Our custom-made outfits were all made

[43] Kofi Asare Opoku, *West African Traditional Religion* (Accra: FEP International Private Limited, 1978), 133.

from the same black and red fabric. Black and red colors are symbolic of supporting the family, while the family members wear black. Even the king, chiefs, and other dignitaries attended in full regalia. We waited at the entrance to be formally introduced, then we made our rounds of greetings before taking our seats. A nice gentleman interpreted the meaning of the various dance movements conducted during the funeral, which were war dances to mitigate the grief within the community.

After we left the funeral, we walked to the community square and encountered Mpeni Kofi, a sacred tree located in front of the Akropong Palace. Dressed in white cloth at the lower end, Mpeni Kofi is considered to be a demi-god with a face that transform into human at nights to guard the community.[44] Mpeni Kofi has been known as a protecter, healer, shelter, nourishment, and fresh air to the community for over three centuries. Our fascination with this mythic tree caught the attention of some of the village men and the King's linguist who was on his way to the burial. The King's linguist stopped, left the large crowd behind, changed from his funeral garment, and walked over to welcome us. He listened intently as we explained the mission of the 313+ Ancestors Speak, and our desire to meet the King. He then invited us into the outer court of the Palace where he performed a libation to the Ancestors. We gathered in a simi circle behind him as he passionately poured out schnapps as a drink offering and communicated in Twi with the Ancestors. Some of us were lamenting as he apologized to us, the descendants of slaves, who were victims of the Transatlantic Slave Trade. According to the linguist, the African leaders did not willingly enable slavery, they were forced.

[44] Mpeni Kofi; the tree that turns human at night to guard his people (ghanaweb.com) (accessed January 26, 2024).

Later that evening, he and the Chief of Unity fellowshipped with us at the Akuapem Presbytery Hospitality Center where we were staying. We all gathered around the table talking and getting to know each other. The Chief gave us a history of her life in America and of the King. She educated us on the culture of the community and the King's agenda on education, respect for the land, tourism and health care. We talked about the Right of Abode (ROA), which was a response to the George Floyd murder and the plight of African of the diaspora. ROA gives African descendants in the diaspora an opportunity to become citizen of Ghana. There is also an incentive to receive land as a means to build up the community. We recognized that the Ghanaians have a strong sense of culture and identity, and they take pride in their heritage. Both of them prepared us for our visit with the King and we were cautioned about one somber act, there is no crying in the King's presence!

Mission accomplished: the 313+ Ancestors Speak Maquette was presented, "On Monday, 1/15/23 a group of African American visited His Royal Majesty Oseadeeyo Kwasi Akuffo III to extend a courtesy call and present a replica monument of the 20 fl statute erected in NJ which commemorates 381 of our ancestors who tragically lost their lives as a result of the slave trade."[45] https://www.facebook.com/offietv?mibextid=LQQJ4d.

Later during the week, we walked the path our enslaved ancestors were forced to take in shackles: it was their final earthly route from home. We relived in our imagination the long and barbaric journey to the stench of Cape Coast and Elmia Castles and to the last bathe they took at the Assin Manso river.

As the griot told the story of our ancestors, we were instructed to take our shoes off as we were on holy grounds. My husband and I held hands as we walked to the river. The sound of our

[45] OFIE TV\Akropong, https://www.facebook.com/offietv?mibexid=LQQJ4d

bare feet touching the ground with the dry leaves created a rhythm of remembrance. Again, I was taken back to my childhood, reminiscing. Walking to the river. Walking to the river back then meant fetching water. It meant playing in the water and having fun, washing clothes in the water, bathing in the water. It meant walking through the meadow, in the pasture where there are animals, birds, fruits, trees and herbs for healing. It meant walking with and in nature. That's what walking to the river meant then. And I realized that's what the ancestors wanted me to remember at the moment rather than their atrocities.

We went by the river and waded in the water. While in the water the ancestors spoke to me. I wanted to bring back some symbols, but did not have anything to place them in. I wanted to bring back some water, sand, and pebbles. The Spirit led me to look over and miraculously there was a bottle and plastic bag that I could use. This was the ancestors providing for me.

At Coconut Grove Beach, all dressed in white, bare footed, we gathered in a circle with the sun beaming down and our feet in the sand, we called all 381 names by the great Transatlantic Ocean where our displaced ancestors were transported to a foreign land. We called the ancestors' name in honor and remembrance. We prayed, we rejoiced, we held hands together as we walked to the water as one.

The GYE NYAME meaning "Except God" is a symbol of Ghanaians' faith in the supremacy of God, and while Christianity is the largest religion amongst the population, Islam, and Traditional follow respectively. We visited several religious structures and were greeted with loving kindness and generosity. We experienced the vibrant Presbyterian congregations in full liturgy with high spirited music, singing, and dance. At the Akouedi Shrine, we first met with the ruling elders, and then received approval to meet with the Priestess. For her, love is acceptance, relationship, and fellowship. It's because of Love we entered into their sacred

grounds and shared space with her and community. Our Muslim Brother is the epitome of love. He gave of his time, resources, and went above and beyond in the spirit of Akwaaba. He got us entrance into the Mosque in Ejisu where we observed and participated in the evening prayer. He gave us an educational tour on family life within the Islamic community, where children play joyously, youths gather for entertainment and adults work collaboratively in the spirit of ubuntu. He invited us into his private and sacred spaces, and even under a tree in the public square where we enjoyed freshly brewed vert, tea. He was our navigator and advocate in the marketplaces and other places. Islam and Christian love is for God and others. It's One Love.

In addition to meeting Nana Mercy, a personal highlight was the journey to, the Nana Yaa Asantewaa Museum in Ejisu. Nana Yaa Asantewaa was a woman warrior I was introduced to through WOMB, Inc. As we were entering the site, a gentleman who was on his way to prayer decided to greet us. He recognized we were visitors and this good Samaritan decided to stop and be our tour guide. This is the Spirit of Love guiding our path. Although the site is under refurbishment, just to be present to enter the structure, and walk in the space Nana occupied, was precious. We walked where she slept, where she strategized, in her secret garden and even in her sacred space. We stopped, we touched the walls, we sensed the Spirit, we heard the sounds. I imagined her words, "If you, the men of Asante, will not go forward, then we will. We, the women will. I shall call upon my fellow women. We will fight! We will fight till the last of us falls in the battlefield." We will fight for love.

We experienced the creative innovative Cedi at his bead factory, a generational jewelry making business, located in the town of Krobo Odumasi. Also, the centuries old legendary Kenta fabric in Adanwomase Kente Village. According to legend, the artistry came from the tutelage of a spider as a local man received weaving lessons from the spider weaving its web. In

Ghanan tradition, the spider's web (Ananse Ntentan, Ntontan), is symbolic of creativity, complexities of life, and wisdom.[46] As a child growing up in Jamaica, the elders and griots would often use "Ananse stories" as a means of teaching us lessons. Ananse is a famous spider in folktales known for his cunningness. At the W.E.B Du Bois Culture Museum in Accra, the symbol (Ntontan) is embedded into the fabric of the room where Du Bois studied, along with hundreds of his books.

I was inspired in our visits to two amazing luxury resorts which are Ghanaian owned and are invested in the future generations. Both employ youths and provide mentoring and training resulting in excellent service and an inspirational atmosphere. The first is Ike's Cultural Village located in the Kumasi Cultural Center complex. This was the fruition of the owner who told us her inspiring story to never give up on a dream. Ike's is a beautiful Afrocentric décor luxury hotel and restaurant. The second is in the Eastern Region of Ghana, where we met the owner of Safari Valley Resort. This is an ecofriendly recreation establishment whose focus is to bring us closer to nature.

I saw me in the land, I saw me in the sky, I saw me in the ocean, I saw me in the fruitful trees, I saw me in the fruits. I saw me in agriculture. I saw me in the people. I saw me in the mothers with babies on their back. I saw me in children playing. I saw me in the youths. I saw me in the women at the market: selling, buying, creating, negotiating. I saw me in the fresh baked bread. I saw me in the colorful garments. I saw me in the dance, the music, the sound, the wind. I saw me in Ghana!

[46] Justice Brobbey, *Adinkra Symbols: Akan Ethnic Wisdom* (Kumasi: Rayconcept, 2023), 12.

CHAPTER 5
RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Biblical

Jesus answered, "The first is, Hear, O Israel: the Lord our God, the Lord is one; you shall love the Lord your God with all your hear, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength. The second is this, You shall love your neighbor as yourself. There is no other commandment greater than these." (Mark 12:29-31).

What can recent biblical scholarship offer to Mark 12:29-31 in affirming that "life, liberty, and happiness" in life or death, is the ultimate act of love? What other biblical themes or passages help understand love in the Biblical narrative?

Life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness are the trilogy of inalienable rights documented in the United States of America's Declaration of Independence which states, "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are life, liberty and the pursuit of Happiness."[47] What does this freedom statement really mean? For the founding fathers who established this decree, it meant independence of the American colonies from the Great British Empire. It meant political, economic, religious, and social freedom. It meant a new identity and the birth of a nation that was ruled by colonialists. However, during this time, in 1776, slavery was a global economic institution for those enslaved and oppressed including women who were not considered nor included in the declaration statement.

Fortunately, God created with equality in mind one human race although there are many perceived differences. Created uniquely and equally but living life in a world of inequality

[47]National Archives: American's Founding Document, Declaration of Independence: A Transcription | National Archives (accessed September 9, 2023).

because of differences: race, sex, culture, abilities, otherness; yet all members of one human race created in the image and likeness of the same God. This trilogy of life, liberty and happiness is God given personal rights which are given individually through birth and retained eternally. These rights cannot be taken away nor are they alienable. Even though the thief came to steal, kill, and destroy a race of people and their life, Jesus already secured life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness in abundance in all its fullness. (John 10:10).

What is Life? What is death?

What is life? Life is the stage between birth and death.[48] Who gives life? Jesus declares that it's the Spirit who gives life. Moreover, spirit and life are in Jesus' spoken words (John 6:63). The Greek word "zoe" is used for life which can mean physical, spiritual, or eternal life. The Apostle John also used "zoe" to describe Jesus Christ as life, "in him was life and the life was the light of all people" (John 1:4). "Pneuma" the Greek word for Spirit also means wind and breath. This is the Spirit in the creation story birthing humanity into existence with the breath of life (Genesis 2:7). The same Spirit the Apostle Paul wrote to the Ephesians in his message on unity, "there is one body and one Spirit" Ephesians 4:4b). What is death? Death is the end of lifetime of a person,[49] when the physical body which was birthed into life no long has pneuma, breath. Life is given by the Spirit through birth and death occurs when life transforms from the physical body. Death, therefore, is a natural part of the lifecycle.

Death and immortality are a significant element in African religions and is viewed several ways. "First, it is seen as another stage in human development. Humans are born, live, die and become our ancestors. Death is thus not the end, but the beginning of another form of

[48] Merriam Webster Dictionary, "Live."

[49] Merriam Webster Dictionary, "Death."

existence, i.e., as ancestor and spirit. Therefore, it is seen as a disruption of life rather than an end to it. After a period of mourning, there is celebration for the human conquest of death. For after the funeral the dead are "revived" in the spirit world, and as ancestors, are close and relevant. Second, death is seen as reflective of cosmic pattern, i.e., the rising and setting of the sun, and often graves are dug east and west to imitate this pattern. Third, death is seen as a transition of life to personal and collective immorality."[50]

Christian eschatology believes there is still life after death, eternal life through Jesus Christ. Meaning Jesus Christ already paid the price for humanity's sin through his life, death, and resurrection. This thought is at the heart of Christology. In doing so, Jesus Christ demonstrated the ultimate expression of love through death by crucifixion. The scripture often quoted, "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, so that everyone who believes in Him may not perish but may have eternal life. Indeed, God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world but in order that the world might be saved through Him." (John 3:16-17). This belief of Jesus' crucifixion, death, burial and bodily resurrection into life eternal is captured in the Apostles' Creed, a faith statement embraced in Christians' liturgical rituals.

For West African Traditional Religion, the belief is that as a result of death, "the departed ones enter into a spiritual state of existence" into the ancestors' realm. The ancestors are revered and believed to be omnipresent, but they are not the pre-eminent God. Similar to Jesus Christ in Christian trinitarian thought, the ancestors are second to God. This correlation depicts Jesus Christ as the divine model Ancestor. According to Kofi Asare Opoku, not every person who dies enters the ancestorial realm, they must meet certain standards which vary based on the region.

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[50] Gayraud S. Wilmore, *African American Religious Studies: An Interdisciplinary Anthology,* (Durham and London, Duke University Press, 1989), 246.

The Akan of Ghana for example, "believe that to become an ancestor one must have lived a life worthy of emulation, an exemplary life; one must also have lived to a ripe old age and have had children."[51] Senegalese poet Birago Diop words below captures this belief regarding ancestors.

Those who are dead are never gone:
They are there in the thickening shadow.
The dead are not under the earth:
They are in the tree that rustles,
They are in the wood that groans,
They are in the water that runs,
They are in the hut, they are in the crowd,
The dead are not dead.
Those who are dead are never gone:
They are in the breast of the woman
They are in the child who is wailing
And in the firebrand that flames.
The dead are not under the earth:
They are in the fire that is dying,
They are in the grasses that weep
They are in the whimpering rocks,
They are in the forest, they are in the house,
The dead are not dead.[52]

Life, liberty, and happiness are God given inalienable virtues which in life or death is the ultimate act of love. God incarnate, Jesus Christ, the Great Ancestor, illustrated the ultimate love by dying for humanity (1John 3:16), resulting in fullness of joy eternally. As the gospel song writer puts it, there is no greater love. God so loved the world that He gave His only Son. The Son gave His life for you and me. Jesus Christ is the Prototype Ancestor for love. When we love God, self and each other, there is eternal life. "We know that we have passed from death to life because we love one another" (1John 3:14a). Love never dies.

[51] Kofi Asare Opoku, *West African Traditional Religion,* (FEP International Private Limited, 1978), 36.

[52] Ibid, 35.

I had the opportunity to present a four-part series on the Power of Love during Agape Tabernacle International Fellowship's (ATIF) "Just A Word" broadcast during the month of May 2023. The 11:00pm weekly empowerment and refreshing time occurs Sundays at 11:00pm by the way of phone. The series was based on the pericope of scripture," Jesus answered, "The first is, Hear, O Israel: the Lord our God, the Lord is one, you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength. The second is this, You shall love your neighbor as yourself. There is no other commandment greater than these." (Mark 12:29-31). The outlines for these sessions and other meditations are indicated below.

Some scholars believe the Gospel of Mark was written 64-67 AD to a Roman audience. It is the second of the four canonical (Matthew, Luke and John) Gospels and one of the three synoptics (Matthew and Luke).[53] Some believe it was written anonymously, others by the Evangelist John Mark. The Gospel tells of Jesus Christs' ministry from His baptism to His death, burial and resurrection. His work as teacher, healer, miracle worker is highlighted and Jesus' position as "Son of God" and Suffering Servant. However, the narrative is silent regarding Jesus' birth and lineage.

Some themes and scriptures that help to understand love in the Biblical narrative are the great commandment to Love, and other such as One God, Listen, Heart, Neighbor\The Good Samaritan and Shema are embedded in these scriptures (Matthew 22:36-40, Mark 12:29-31, Deuteronomy 6:4-9; 11:13-21). The Excellence and Characteristics of Love are in the epistle of 1 Corinthians chapter 13. Immortality, Resurrection, New Birth and Eternal Life (John 3:1-35) are other motifs as well as Love Prescribed (John 13:34-35).

[53] Robert Gundry, *A Survey of the New Testament, Third Edition* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1994), 125-158.

The Power of Love

May 7, 2023[54]

A Theology of Love -- The Great Commandment – Love Prescribed – The Power of Love
Mark 12:29-31
Jesus answered, "The first is Hear, O Israel: the Lord our God, the Lord **is one**;

you shall love the Lord your God with all your ***heart***, and with all your ***soul***, and with all your ***mind***, and with all your ***strength***.

The second is this, you shall ***love your neighbor as yourself***. There is no other commandment greater than these.

Additional Scriptures: Deuteronomy 6:4-9; 11:13-21; Numbers 15:37-41, 1Corinthians 13,

The word I will be presenting to you this evening and the subsequent Sundays appears in the Bible over 500 times. Exceeding Faith and Hope, this word is considered to be the greatest of all virtues (1Corinthians 13:13). I am sure you've guessed it: Yes, the word is LOVE. However, this love is neither philia (friendship type love) nor Eros (romantic Love) nor Philautia (Self Love), NO, the love of focus is Agape, the highest form of Love – a Love that embraces a universal unconditional passion of oneness. Agape, Love transcends and endures regardless of the circumstance. It's God's Love! God's love for humanity that goes beyond emotions to the extent of seeking the best for others. Agape, Love so befitting as ATIF is celebrating 25 years of a ministry, a ministry whose foundation is Love!

To provide context, Jesus was being tested by the religious leaders and one of the scribes impressed with Jesus' wisdom and knowledge asked Jesus, "Which commandments is the first of all? (12:28) Jesus responded by echoing the words Moses decreed:

"Hear, O Israel: The Lord is our God, the Lord alone, You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might. Keep these words that I am commanding you today in your heart. Recite them to your children and talk about them when you are at home and when you are away, when you lie down and when you rise. Bind them as a sign on your hand, fix them in an emblem on your forehead, and write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates" (Deuteronomy 6:4-9). It's a declaration God gave Moses to teach

[54] Primrose Sinclair Hammond, "The Power of Love" (Just A Word, Agape Tabernacle International Fellowship, May 7, 2023).

the nation. Love, the great commandment, is to be observed diligently with a focusing on quality relationship towards both God and neighbor.

The Jews calls this pericope, **Shema**, it's a daily declaration of faith in God, prayer to be recited Morning evening/afternoon and I am adding night. (***I am reminded of my Grandmother instructing me to pray: first thing when I arise and last thing before going to bed***)

Threefold meaning for Shema: Lisen, Heed, Action.

listen (not just hear as in ears perceiving sound and the brain processing information).

Take heed, pay attention, and respond with action to what has been heard.

So, on a daily basis at least twice as part of our prayer ritual we are to live out our commitment to God, putting into practice Love for God. This is how we establish and sustain relationship with our God.

I will leave with this: "Which commandments is the first? "Jesus answered, *"The first is Hear, O Israel: the Lord our God, the Lord* ***is one.*** AGAPE IN ALL YOUR WAYS**!**

May 14, 2023[55]

A Theology of Love -- The Power of Love -- The Great Commandment – Love Prescribed
Mark 12:29-31
29-Jesus answered, "The first is Hear, O Israel: the Lord our God, the Lord **is one**;

30-you shall love the Lord your God with all your ***heart***, and with all your ***soul***, and with all your ***mind***, and with all your ***strength***.

31 The second is this, you shall ***love your neighbor as yourself***. There is no other commandment greater than these.

pericope is referred to as the Shema which is significant to Jewish daily prayers. It is used as a confession of faith, while building relationship with God. Last week we focused on the Shema's first stanza "Hear, O Israel, the Lord is our God, the Lord is one". The second stanza "you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength" is the emphasis of tonight's message. Keep in mind that the love we are talking about is Agape, God Unconditional Love that goes beyond emotions and seeks the best for others. The text challenges us to Love God fully, with our whole selves. We shall love God with all our heart.

Heart (Greek word kardias KAR-DEE'-AHS) the heart, the thoughts, or feelings/emotions also the middle, the circulation of the blood, and hence was regarded as the

[55] Primrose Sinclair Hammond, "The Power of Love" (Just A Word, Agape Tabernacle International Fellowship, May 14, 2023).

seat of physical life. Denotes the center of all physical and spiritual life. The center and seat of spiritual life.

The heart is the lifeline of our existence, both physically and spiritually. At the size of a fist, the muscular organ is positioned behind our breastbone and at the rhythm of about 72 beats per minute the heart pumps blood to our cardiovascular system which circulates blood throughout our body. Blood gives us the power and sustenance needed to survive by supplying oxygen and food throughout our body. Yet, the heart is mortal and is a dwelling place where our emotions, desires and actions are conceived. All our behaviors, whether good or bad, are essentially a matter of the heart. This is why the psalmist (119) is earnestly seeking God through spiritual disciplines of mediations, prayers and believes, blessed are those who seek God with all their heart.

Soul (psyches) From psucho; breath, i.e.: spirit, abstractly or concretely; essence of a person.

Mind (dianoias) deep thought, critical thinking.

Strength (ischyos) strength (absolutely), power, might, force, ability.

When the heart stops, so does the flow of blood that's pumped throughout the body. Brain damage will begin in a matter of minutes because of the lack of oxygen causing cardiac arrest.

"To love is nothing, to be loved is something but to love and to be loved by the one you love, that is everything. Never take love for granted."

May 28, 2023[56]
A Theology of Love -- The Power of Love -- The Great Commandment – Love Prescribed

Good Evening Beloved Family!

Tonight, concludes the four-part segment on the Power of Love utilizing Mark 12:29-31 as the scripture of reference. This pericope is known as the Shema. Shema is intentional prayers to listen, obey and act to what has been heard.

First, we focused on the 1st stanza, "Jesus answered, the first is hear, O Israel the Lord our God, the Lord is one. This is the oneness of God. Yes, for us there is one God, from whom are all things and for whom we exist, and one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom are all things and through whom we exist. (1Corinthians 8:6). And as we acknowledge Pentecost today, the Holy Spirit, which is the third part of this oneness, the Blessed Trinity: Creator God, Jesus Christ, Lord and Savior, and the Holy Spirit, Three in one.

[56] Primrose Sinclair Hammond, "The Power of Love" (Just A Word, Agape Tabernacle International Fellowship, May 28, 2023).

Second, we focused on the 2nd stanza – Loving God Fully! You shall love the Lord your God with all you heart and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength.

Third, we focused on the 3rd stanza you shall love your neighbor as yourself. Emphasize one cannot truly love others until one can love self.

- Loving self means taking care of yourself physically.
- Loving self means taking care of yourself spiritually.
- Loving self means taking care of yourself emotionally.

Love your Neighbor:

We have definitely heard the phrase "Love Your Neighbor As Yourself." But what does it really mean to love your neighbor as yourself? Do we truly understand the way Jesus Christ intended?

Love Your Neighbor As Yourself is the second great commandment. It immediately follows Jesus' commandment of loving God with all your heart, mind, and soul. Following this commandment is the key Jesus Christ gave us for loving others as God loves us.

Who is Our Neighbor? (Luke 10:25)

Well, when a Pharisee asked, "Who is my neighbor?" Instead of giving a direct answer, Jesus Christ turned the question on the Pharisee by telling the parable of the Good Samaritan.

The parable of the Good Samaritan tells the story of a man who was attacked by robbers on the road to Jericho. He was stripped of his clothes, beaten, and was left for dead. Soon after, a priest (pastor, minister) was passing by the same road and when he saw the man, he went to the other side of the road and continued on his way. A Levite then passed by, and he too moved to the other side of the road when he saw the man. But a Samaritan came by and when he saw the man, he took pity on him, poured oil and wine on his wounds, carried him on his donkey and brought him to an inn and took care of him there. The following day he gave the innkeeper two denarii and asked him to look after the man, adding that when he returns, he will compensate the innkeeper for any extra expense he may have. After telling the story Jesus asked the Pharisee which he thought among the three was a neighbor to the man who was robbed to which the Pharisee replied, "The man who showed mercy." Jesus then told the Pharisee to go and do likewise.

In Jesus' commandment, He taught us that it is not about asking who our neighbor is. Rather, it is about our own willingness to be a neighbor ready to love. It is obvious in the parable of the Good Samaritan that our neighbor can even be a complete stranger who we can expect nothing from in return. But, following the commandment of Jesus Christ means being a neighbor to everyone, and most importantly it is about us being that good neighbor. It starts with us.

Love God, Love Self and Love Your Neighbor. Who is your neighbor? Everyone, all of God's creation.

Love is the Message[57]

For this is the message you heard from the beginning: We should love one another. (1John 3:11 NIV) ***Love is the Message – The Message is Love – Love is the Main Ingredient (Flavor)***

Love is mentioned over 500 times in the Bible, 72 are found in Johannine' s writings. In 1John 4:7-12 the Apostle John mentions Love in every verse. Clearly, Love is the central theme of John's message and its ethical teaching focuses on the command to love one another. Love is the message Jesus instructed His disciples to demonstrate at the Last Supper. A message to Love, is the new commandment Jesus give to you and I and all his followers.

This love is neither philia (friendship type love) nor Eros (romantic Love) nor Philautia (Self Love), NO, this love is Agape, The highest form of Love that embraces a universal unconditional passion that transcends and endures regardless of the circumstance. It's God's Love for humanity that goes beyond emotions to the extent of seeking the best for others.

Love one another: just as I have loved you, Jesus said. Love is the testimony by which all people will know that we are Jesus's disciples. (John 13:34-35). Jesus wants His followers to care for each other with distinction by demonstrating the greatest of all virtue, love. But how do you and I know we are demonstrating love? Well, we can learn from the model Jesus gave us on how to love one another. Three such attributes are sacrificial, selflessness and sincerity Sacrificially, Selflessly and Sincerely.

We are to love one another:

Sacrificially/Self-denial – verse (16) We know what love is because Jesus Christ gave his life for us. So we should give our lives to our brothers and sisters.

Selflessly/kind, generous, giving, merciful – verse (17) Suppose someone sees a brother or sister in need and is able to help them. And suppose that person doesn't take pity on these needy people. Then how can the love of God be in that person?

Sincerely/Authentic, Good Work – verse (18), Dear children, don't just talk about love. Put your love into action. Then it will truly be love.

During this Lenten season and beyond, let echo the message of Love, God's unconditional love. A sacrificial Love, A Selfless Love, A Sincere Love that compels us to love one another. Agape In All Your Ways!

Heart Matters[58]

Blessed are those who keep God's statutes and seek God with all their heart. (Psalms 119:2), What is the condition of your heart? Is your heart healthy?

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[57] Primrose Sinclair Hammond. "Love is the Message" (Agape Tabernacle World Outreach Ministries, March 16, 2022).

[58] Primrose Sinclair Hammond, "Heart Matters" (Meditation Psalms 119: 1-8, Agape Tabernacle International Fellowship, March 3, 2021).

The heart is the lifeline of our being, both physically and spiritually. At the size of a fist, the muscular organ is positioned behind our breastbone and at the rhythm of about 72 beats per minute the heart pumps blood to our cardiovascular system which circulates blood throughout our body. Blood gives us the power and sustenance needed to survive by supplying oxygen and food throughout our body. Certainly, it's essential for us to keep our heart healthy and strong. Yet, the heart is mortal and is a dwelling place where our emotions, desires and actions are conceived. All our behaviors, whether good or bad, are essentially a matter of the heart.

Accordingly, the heart is where spiritual life begins, and God will renew and transform our heart with a new spirit (Ezekiel 36:26). The stirring of our heart prompts us to pursue God with all our mind and when we do, we will know God (Jeremiah 29:13). This is why the psalmist is earnestly seeking God through spiritual disciplines of mediations, prayers and believes, blessed are those who seek God with all their heart (Psalms 119:2). Seeking and returning to God with our whole heart is key to life happiness. Yes, we can certainly find joy in establishing a relationship with God. However, when life situations do not make sense in our hearts, we can still trust God with all our heart, and do not lean on our own understanding. (Proverbs 3:5).

Our heart matters, it is the core of our existence, and God sets great importance on keeping our hearts wholesome, above all else, guard your heart, for everything you do flows from it (Proverbs 4:23).

Prayer:
God create in us a clean heart and renew the right spirit in us.

Source: Matthew Hoffman, MD. *Picture of the Heart, Human Anatomy.* webmd.com (accessed February 19, 2021).

Historical

The Declaration of Independence states, "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness." What is the historical significance of unalienable rights concerning Africans' identity and human rights? What does it mean to be human? What is the impact of free and enslaved Africans buried in unmarked graves? Why are Africans buried in unmarked graves?

The United States of America was a colony of the British Empire, and in 1776, in order to be independent, the founding fathers crafted the Declaration of Independence, the governing document in which America was established. It states the fundamental principles on which the government and identity as a nation are based.[59] These core liberal principles were based on the founding fathers' beliefs and convictions which slave owner Thomas Jefferson describes as self-evident truths.[60] Although the framework of the document references equality and unalienable rights, these assertions only applied to the dominate population who the founders represented, white male colonists. In other words, the declaration was formed on racist and sexist thoughts based on the social culture during the late eighteenth century. Women and Native Americans were excluded. The institution of slavery was the driving force of the economy, so consequently African Americans were excluded. In fact, "when composing the galvanizing manifesto, Jefferson omitted language that would have condemned the slave trade."[61] Why would they include language such as sacred, undeniable, independent, equal creation, derive rights inherent, the preservation of life, liberty, and pursuit of happiness? Slavery was a flourishing institution and free labor for slave owners. African Americans were considered to be an inferior race and

[59] National Archives: American's Founding Documents, The Declaration of Independence | National Archives (accessed September 7, 2023).

[60] Ibid.

[61] Ibram X. Kendi and Keisha N. Blain, *Four Hundred Souls: A Community History of African America. 1619 – 2019* (NY: One World, 2021), 141.

even "the Articles of Confederation,' in the following year, 1777, did not speak to the problem of slavery. Certainly, this was an oxymoron to claim liberty, while institutionalizing slavery. It was a scheme that relegated human bondage to a matter to be regulated by the individual states."[62]

Fredrick Douglas argues it best in his oration delivered July 5, 1852, at Corinthian Hall, Rochester, "What to a Slave is the 4th of July?" In his speech address to the President, friend and citizens, Douglas asserted the hypocrisy of white Americans' celebration of liberty and independence while slavery continues. Challenging the moral character of a nation's birth based on Christian ideology, he believed, faithful Christians should acknowledge that slavery is wrong. "My soul sickens at the sight," said Douglas. "Is this the land your Fathers loved? The freedom which they toiled to win? Is this the earth whereon they moved? Are these the graves they slumber in?"[63] asked Douglas.

Although the ideology of inalienable rights are moral virtues granted by God through eternity to all creation, African American people were not included in The Declaration of Independence narrative. The ethics of identity, freedom and human rights did not apply to Africans. Why? Was it because African Americans were considered inhuman? Was it because African Americans were not considered citizens? Was it because African Americans were considered commodities on a stock market to be bought and sold? In the lyrics of Bob Marley, Africans had their own identity before they were stolen from Africia, brought to America, and fighting for survival. Africans were queens, kings, warriors with a rich history. From the birth of civilization, the African nations were great well-organized civilizations. For example,

[62] Ibid.

[63] Fredreck Douglass, *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, An American Slave* (NY: Quarto Publishing Group, 2017), 141.

Timbuktu, located in the West African country of Mali, was one of the world's greatest cities in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries.[64] Timbuktu was known as an intellectual center for its scholars and social life. In addition, the country flourished agriculturally and with the trading of salt, gold, and ivory.

Over a century later, in 1948 after the Declaration of Independence, even with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights which declares all human beings are free and equal irrespective of color creed or religion, the struggle continues.

What does it mean to be human? According to Theologian Daniel Migliore, human beings are a mystery, rational and irrational, civilized and savage, capable of deep friendship and murderous hostility, free and in bondage, the pinnacle of creation and its greatest danger.[65] Similarly, from a neuroscientific perspective, Dr. Phil Lueck, retired professor of Biblical Studies, university of Northwestern, discussed the complexities of humanity, especially the anatomy. Are humans monistic, material/physical beings or dualistic, non-material with both body and soul? Lucek concluded that with the limits of our human faculties and penchant, we will never know all knowledge and truth absolutely of what it means to be human.[66] Essentially humans are an evolving mystery. From a black psychological scientific point of perspective, Baba Dr. Wade Nobles believes human is a divine spirit having a human experience.[67]

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[64] Lerone Bennett, Jr. *Before The Mayflower: A History of Black America* (Johnson Publishing Company, Inc., 1962). 1-27.

[65] Daniel L. Migliore, *Faith Seeking Understanding: An Introduction to Christian Theology, 2nd Edition* (Grand Rapids, MH: Wm B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2004), 139.

[66] Phil Lueck, "What Does It Mean to be Human?" In Search of a Theology of the Soul in an Age of Science: Issues, Assumptions, Options, and Challenges, Lueck_What_It_Means_to_Be_Human.pdf (cslewis.org) (accessed October 27, 2023).

[67] Wade W. Nobles, *SKH: From Black Psychology To The Science of Being* (NY: Universal White Publications, LLC. 2023), 89.

Humanity is a manifestation of liberating and radiating spirit; a person is a known, knowing, and knowable spirit which equates to energy. Coherent, interconnected, and relational, yet unique. This divine energy exists in the rhythm of the universe, which is presently living, yet to be born and the afterlife. When this divine energy is out of rhythm there is chaos and insanity. All views are thought provoking. However, the theological view of Imago Dio, created in the image of God (Genesis 1:27), "to live freely and gladly in relationships of mutual respect and love"[68] is fitting as to what it means to be human. For Migliore, "being created in the image of God means that humans find their true identity in coexistence with each other and with all other creatures"[69] The late Anglican Archbishop Desmond Tutu often referenced the Bantu's Ubuntu philosophy, "I am human only because you are human." Humans interconnect with God, each other, and all of creation. This understanding facilities the greatest theological commandment of: Love God, Love Self, Love Neighbor (Mark 12:30).

The community may not know why Africans are buried in unmarked graves. Yet, we can speculate annihilation, oppression, socioeconomical, discriminative or racial reasons due to period of time. But further research will provide revelation. Novelist Alice Walker for example, in her quest to revive Zora Neale Hurston's literary legacy, "walker felt drawn to travel to the cemetery where Zora Neale Hurston was buried, the Garden of Heavenly Rest in Fort Pierce, Florida,"[70] discovered Hurston's grave site was unmarked. As a memorial and honor, Walker

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[68] Daniel L. Migliore, *Faith Seeking Understanding: An Introduction to Christian Theology, 2nd Edition* (Grand Rapids, MH: Wm B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2004), 141.

[69] Ibid, 144.

[70] Norma Bricker, "How Alice Walker Rediscovered Zora Neale Hurston," *Literary Ladies Guide,* May 22, 2020, literaryladiesguide.com/literary-musings/how-alice-walker-rediscovered-zora-neale-hurston. (accessed October 27, 2023).

then secured a headstone and had it engraved: “A Genius of the South, 1901 – 1960, Novelist Folklorist Anthropologist.” Now, generations will know of her brilliant legacy. But, what about the millions of Africans who died while stolen from their home, transported to the river, to the dungeons, to the ships, to the sea, into a foreign land? Are there markers to commemorate their tombs? Perhaps no tombstone markers are necessary because they are not dead, but alive. Alive in the spirit, speaking with the living.

The SHFPC’s First Cemetery graveyard goes back to the four centuries, 1760s to 1880. So, markers would have been destroyed over time due to natural causes such as weather, breakage, or degeneration. According to an article by the African American Registry (AAREG), slaves were typically buried at night, in some cases with a torch for light, because they could not take off work during the day, so graves may not have had markers. Since Traditional African Religion embraced ancestral belief and the continuation of life after death. “burial provided an opportunity for dignity that was denied during life and Black African beliefs held that the dead would be returning to Africa for a better life.” Of the 381 identified Africans parishioners buried in the graveyard, a colored 24-year-old man by the name of Lafayette Baylston is the only one with a headstone marker. Lafayette’s cause of death is listed as consumption, and he was buried March 3, 1849. According to research, Mr. Baylston’s funeral was paid for by his slave owner. This may be the case for others. Like Mr. Baylston they may have had markers, but the markers decimated over time.

What is the impact of free and enslaved Africans buried in unmarked graves? Unmarked graves are mystifying and invoke questions – who, what, where, when and how? There are unknown social, political, cultural, and economic stories and histories to be told. In the case of Zora Neale Hurston, the rediscovery of knowledge and a pattern for future generations. Stories

such as the 15,000+ free and enslaved Africans during the late 1600s through 1700 living in a colonial metropolis. Uprooted in 1991, the 419 African remains and 500+ individual artifacts are known to be one of the most significant archeological discoveries of the 20th century.[71] The African Burial Ground in New York City is of global importance because of what it can inform us about the lives of Africans and African Americans over four centuries ago. As a result of this uncovering, people united for a common cause of knowing, justice, and resolution and as a result, there was a communal funeral celebration and a monument established in honor of the ancestors. The site is now a national historic landmark and official national monument. The impact of free and enslaved Africans buried in unmarked graves is a revolutionary sociopolitical movement, to go back in time, learn about humanity and create memories. The February 2019 African American Burial Ground Network Act, intended to protect historical Black cemeteries, was passed by the US Senate. These stories demonstrate love in action – when people are united for the common good, change happens.

The impact of free and enslaved Africans buried in unmarked graves will stir up the spirit, the spirit of the ancestors to speak, and for those who have ears to hear, listen and act. In the Gospels and the Book of Revelation, Jesus Christ encouraged followers to listen to what the spirit is saying (Mark 4:9, 23; Matthew 11:15, 13:9; Revelation 2:7). Act on divine mission and instructions are told. Active listening will cause revolutionary change such as the movements of these early century African Women: Queen Nzinga Mbade (1583 – 1663), a political, militant strategist and monarch of the Mbudu people who fought against the Portuguese and their expanding slave trade. Prophetess Kimpa Vita aka Dona Beatriz (1684 – 1706), as a teenager,

[71] National Park Service, New York: African Burial Ground National Monument (U.S. National Park Service) (nps.gov)(access October 27, 2023).

non-violently rebelled against colonizers to liberate Kongo, and as a result established the charismatic Antonianism Christian movement against religion and colonizers. Queen Nanny of the Maroons in Jamaica West Indies (1686 – 1760) led a community of the formerly enslaved against the British Empire. Queen Mother Yaa Asantewaa, Ejisu Ghana (1840-1921) led her people to war for independence against the British Empire. These revolutionary leaders fiercely and freely operated in the spirit of love.

Reggae artist Robert Nesta Marley terms this stirring spirit, natural mystic in the lyrics of his prophetic song with The Wailers, 1977. This echoing rhythm, "There is a natural mystic blowin' through the air. If you listen carefully now you will hear" spoke "Love Matters" and inspired the trajectory of a theology of love. This stirring is a symphony from the great cloud of witnesses encircling humanity according to the Apostle Paul (Hebrews 12:1) – it's the voice of the ancestors. Reverand, Dr. Wanda Lundy, listened and acted. She understands the mission of why the ancestors called her to SHFPC in 2019. It's a sociopolitical, faith-based assignment of resurrection, the uprooting and restoration of lives through storytelling and making the unknown known. Hence, Dr. Lundy established the 313+ Ancestors Research Project to honor and lift up the stories of the great cloud of witnesses, the ancestors buried in SHFPC's graveyard. "For people of color, much of our history has been hidden and distorted; we've been told we didn't even have a history. Now is the time for us to dispel that mistruth, which is a lie. The beginning of finding that story is with our ancestors,"[72] said Dr. Lundy whose motivation was social justice. These stories are examples of the spiritual energy of love which causes action and transformation.

[72] 313+ Ancestors Speak Project, Elizabeth church resurrects stories of African American ancestors on burial grounds - 313+ Ancestors Speak Research Project (313ancestorsspeakproject.org) (access February 21, 2023).

What is the impact of free and enslaved Africans buried in unmarked graves? Psychological and physiological historical trauma continued transgenerational. For over four hundred years the institution of slavery, enslaving a race of people due to the content of their Black skin, has been in the memory of humanity. The atrocity of being kidnapped, shackled, separated from family, stripped of identity, witness to brutality against loved ones, and further transported to a foreign land is traumatizing. How could Africans sing the Lord's song in such predicament? Through the Spirit of Love and resilience. Dr. Kyalen Conner's article published in Psychology Today, theorizes historical trauma is critical to understanding Black people's mental health, and concluded that such trauma has lasting effect on individuals and communities.[73] For Dr. Conner, occurrences such as Slavery, Civil War, Jim Crow, and Segregation that happen to a class of human beings who share a specific identity, defines historical trauma. The results of such events are a "significant disrupt traditional ways of life, culture, and identity."[74] In the case of African Americans, they represent a history of sustained community disturbance and devastation, which is profoundly traumatic. Furthermore, "historical trauma passed on intergenerationally accumulates in subsequent generations when one's ancestors didn't have the opportunity to heal."[75] So, a process of therapeutic healing is needed for the trauma carried in our bodies to not be transmitted to the next generation.

In today's environment, historical traumas manifest trigger emotional and physiological responses to race-based stressors such as discrimination, oppression and microaggressions that

[73] Kyalen O. Conner, "Why Historical Trauma is Critical to Understanding Black Mental Health," https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/achieving-health-equity/202010/why-historical-trauma-is-critical-understanding-black-mental (accessed January 8, 2024).

[74] Ibid.

[75] Ibid.

make current events traumatizing for African Americans. For example, African American identifies themselves, a family member in the murder of Geroge Floyd and Breonna Taylor.[76] These incidents are not experienced in isolation, but rather as a cumulative experience of historical trauma. Many parents such as myself experience such emotional trauma, not knowing if their children will make it home safely or not.

Theological

What new recovery, renewed emphasis, clarification, or reconstruction of theology and doctrines need to take place to develop a Theology of Love? The key emphasis to develop a Theology of Love is knowing that God is Love, God's Spirit is Love. Therefore, starting from creation the origin of Love is reconstructed highlighting the following dimensions of Love: Mysterious Love, Relational Love, Redemptive Love, Prophetic Love, and The Gospel according to Love. A renewed emphasis is that of Jesus Christ as Proto Ancestor and Greatest Ancestor. Another renewed emphasis is the ancestors speak.

What theological schools of thought or voices can help develop a new Theology of Love? African Christian Theology, West African Traditional Theology, Ancestral Theology, Grandma Theology, Womanist Theology, Circle Theology of Dr. Mercy Amba Ewudziwa Oduyoye and Love Theology.

Mysterious Love

God is a mystery to be revealed and encountered similar to the 381 free and enslaved Africans buried in unmarked graves. Unless God is experience, like the many unknown ancestors, God is unknown, yet to be acknowledged. Jewish mysticism thought, Kabbalah, assumes God is unknowable and humanity can only know those aspects of God that are revealed.

[76] Ibid.

Consequently, God the Creator of the universe is called Ein Sof, "the Endless One" or "Endless Light" which is a metaphor for revelation.[77] In his sermon on Mars' Hill, the Apostle Paul educated the people of Athens on their worshiping "TO AN UNKNOWN GOD." From the creation story to the resurrection, Paul enlightened the hearers (Acts 17:22-32) about God.

Origin of Love

In Christian Theology, the beginning starts with the Genesis narrative of God birthing a formless empty world, creatio ex nihilo, creation out of nothing.[78] The Spirit of God further created provision by the way of the spoken words, "Let There Be": Let there be light (1:3), Let there be an expanse (1:6), and God named what God birthed into existence: light named day and darkness night (1:5); expansion named heaven (1:8). As seen from the birth of the universe, God is a Spirit of action -- name and identity are important to God. Theologian Mercy Amba Oduyoye views this creation as liberation, it's a story of the redemption that God presents to a chaotic world. Nana Mercy suggests that "the narrative does not pretend to be a history of origins or a scientific explanation of what is. It is an attempt to say who God is."[79] Additionally, "to affirm that chaos is contrary to the nature of God, and that the universe came into being out of the "pain of God"," [80] Conceptually, God gave birth to the universe and "delivers" the universe from chaos. Although painful at times, Love is liberating.

In giving birth to humanity, God said," Let us make humankind in our image, according

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[77] David Aaron, *The Secret Life of God: Discovering The Divine Within You* (MA: Shambhala, 2004), 9.

[78] Daniel L. Migliore, *Faith Seeking Understanding: An Introduction to Christian Theology, 2nd Edition* (Grand Rapids, MH: Wm B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2004), 407.

[79] Mercy Amba Oduyoye, *Hearing and Knowing: Theological Reflections on Christianity in Africa* (NY: Orbis Books, 1991), 90.

[80] Ibid.

to our likeness; and let them have dominion." (1:26) So God created humankind in God's image, in the image of God, God created them, male and female. (1:27). "Being created in the image of God means that humans find their true identity in coexistence with each other and with all other creatures."[81] In juxtaposition to the second birthing narrative, God formed humankind from the dust of the ground and breathed into the nostrils the breath of life and humankind became a living being (2:7). Analogically, a pregnant woman has several ways of giving birth. For me, being on both spectrums of giving birth is a rewarding experience. Firstly, by way of vaginal birth, two sons were delivered from my womb. Then, being a doula and witness to my first grandchild's entrance into this world. Either way, in God's image, C-Section or the breath of life, vaginal natural, the birthing process is a divine illustration of love.

The story continues on the trajectory of a loving Spirit, a God who created and provided everything humans needed for survival in this world. God provided an earthly abode supplementing it with water, food, light, other living creatures and even a flourishing garden. In the permissive will of God, humans have options to choose between good and evil, to obey or disobey. Disobedience is going against the will of the Spirit of God and that's what humankind decided when tempted. Humanity knowingly went against God's will to "freely eat of every tree of the garden; but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall die." (2:17). Additionally, they reiterated God's words of instructions in a discourse with the deceiver. Choosing the path of deception resulted in death, spiritual separation from the Spirit of God.

Relational Love

Clearly, God desired fellowship and divine human relationship from the beginning. After

[81] Ibid, 144.

God's masterful creation of humanity in God's own image and providing guidelines for life, God took an evening walk down to the Garden of Eden to fellowship with them (Genesis 3:8-14). Surely the omniscient God was fully aware of the defiance. Anthropomorphically, one can imagine the emotional state of God caused by humans' rebellion. Was God angry? Was God sorrowful? Was God regretful? Was God Depressed? Was God empathetic? Was God traumatized? Conversely, how were the humans feeling towards themselves and God?

A few years ago, my youngest son chose a path neither his father nor I thought he was ready for. His decision to leave home and suspend communication with family members disrupted our household and relationship. Needless to say, I was devastated! I could not sleep at night, just tossing and turning sleep at night, having nightmares! I was traumatized! Why? Mainly due to socially traumatic events. Young, Black men living in America sill get executed even by those who should be protecting their lives. Paradoxically, "after all the attention of the Black Lives Matter led racial justice movement generated after George Floyd's death in 2020, Black People killed by police has increased,"[82] according to a March 3, 2022, NBC online article by Curtis Bunn. Blacks are being killed at a higher rate based on "data collected by the Washington Post, Black people accounts for 27% of those fatally shot and killed by police in 2021."[83] The article further states that, "Black people are twice as likely as White people to be shot and killed by Police Officer."[84]

God could have just spoke words like in creation or ran in the garden. However, in the

[82] Curtis Bunn, "Black People Are Still Killed by Police at a Highter Rate than other Groups," NBC News, March 3, 2022. https://www.nbcnews.com/news/nbcblk/report-black-people-are-still-killed-police-higher-rate-groups-rcna17169.

[83] https://www.washingtonpost.com/graphics/investigations/police-shootings-database/Ibid. (accessed January 2024).

[84] Ibid.

text God is walking (Genesis 3:8). Was God taking a meditative walk, contemplating the situation and necessary action to take? Was God thinking, they are my children whom I've created in my own image, they disobeyed my instructions willfully knowing the consequence is death, separation from me? Now, I must implement a plan of redemption as an option to bring salvation to humanity? This is heartbreaking, to be separated from your likeness and fruit of your womb. Separation is traumatic for all parties involved. However, God walking in the garden implies reflective thoughts and patience, not irritability or anger. After God's moment of introspection, the loving God divinely called humans to talk through the disobedient behavior, the consequences and plan for redemption (Genesis 3:9:19).

Love always protects, hopes and preserves (1 Corinthians 13:7).

Redemptive Love

God's redemption plan invoked a curse against the deceiver and conflict between the deceiver and the woman which will continue to future generations as a means of retribution. The salvific plan also provided a prophetic seed as antidote in the protoevangelium, the first message of hope and redemption. "I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will strike your head, and you will strike his heal" (Genesis 3:15). Over four hundred years later, the Messianic Prophetic seed continued to germinate in Egypt through Abram; "And I will bless those who bless you, and the one who curses you I will curse and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed." (Genesis 12:3). Still, over two hundred years later, the prophet Isaiah continued with the message of salvific hope all through the nations. In doing so, Isaiah fulfilled the meaning of his name, "the Lord saves." His prophetic mission of prophesizing the coming messiah is evident throughout the book of Isaiah with prophesies such as, "Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign. Look, the young woman is with child and

shall bear a son and shall name him Immanual." (Isaiah 7:14). "For a child has been born for us, a son given to us; authority rests upon his shoulders; and he is named, Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace." (9:6) and the description of a suffering servant in chapter 53. God reconciliation to humanity is an act of Love which breaks the cycle of estrangement caused by original sin between humanity and God.

Prophetic Love

It took forty-two generations for the manifestation of the Messianic Prophetic. Six hundred years after Isaiah prophesied and after a period of four hundred years silence between the First Testament to the Second Testament. In the inception of the world, God manifested as a Creator Spirit using natural elements: earth, breath/air, and Imago Dei in parturition humans. But, in God's work of redemption and salvation, the Spirit showed up in the womb of a woman, the beloved Mary. Who would have thought the promised messiah, savior of the world, would have been delivered from the virgin womb of an unwed teenage girl? What was the emotional state of Mary hearing the news of being chosen theotokos, God bearer? Receiving an unexpected visit from not just any messenger, but from the Archangel Gabriel, was shocking. Although Gabriel welcomed Mary warmly with honor and kindness, "Greetings, favored one! The Lord is with you." (Luke 1:28), understandably, Mary was baffled by her supernatural encounter. Mary was very perplexed by Gabriel's words, so she pondered and contemplated for discernment. Meanwhile, Gabriel further provided loving words while delivering the annunciation to Mary. "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. And now you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you will name him Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High and the Lord God will give to him the throne of his ancestor David." (Luke 1:28-32). How could a virgin give birth without sexual intercourse?

Miraculously, by having a Holy Spirit impregnation encounter. "How can this be, since I am a virgin" (1:34) said Mary. "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore, the child to be born will be holy; he will be called Son of God," said Gabriel (1:35). The Holy Spirit is the giver of life. After having this reflective dialogue with Gabrial, Mary understood her assignment and joyously responded in agreement, "Here am I" (1:38) making herself available to be the mother of redemptive love.

Jesus, Proto and Greatest Ancestor

In the fullness of time, Mary gave birth to incarnation. Mary's Son, the Promised Massiah was born in their ancestral land, Bethlehem a city in Palestine. And this momentous occasion of love was heralded as an angel proclaimed to shepherds stating, "I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people. To you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is the Messiah, the Lord." (2:10-11). This is the foundation of the earthly aspect of Christology and the new creation.[85] After Jesus started his public ministry, Jesus explained the concept of new creation in a discourse with a religious leader by the name of Nicodemus. Jesus emphasized rebirth by the Spirit and flesh verses Spirit birth. "You must be born again." Said Jesus (3:7) "The Son of Man be lifted up", the promise of believers having eternal life (3:15) then the declaration of God's eternal love "For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, so that who believes in Him may not perish, but have eternal life." (John 3:16). Jesus came into the world with a salvific mission that the world should be saved through Jesus. (John 3:17). Jesus was clear about his mission and was intentional in its fulfillment. The Gospel of Luke tells of Jesus reiterating Isaiah's prophetic message to the synagogue worshipers, "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He

[85] Jurgen Moltmann, *The Trinity and the Kingdom* (Fortress Press ed., 1993), 115.

has sent me to proclaim release to the captive and recovery of sight to the blind to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor" (Luke 4:18; Isaiah 61:1). So, Jesus' ministry was one of teacher, preacher, healer, restorer, and liberator.

God's response to salvation culminated in Jesus' death, burial, and resurrection. Leading up to Jesus' crucifixion, Jesus had an agonizing conversation with God in the Garden of Gethsemane. Determined to do the will of God, Jesus was between life and death. In seeking a way out of this extremely difficult assignment, Jesus inquired "Father, if you are willing, remove this cup from me; yet not my will but yours be done." (Luke 22:42) God responded by sending an angel to strengthen Jesus for the mission. Though assured by God, the thought of what he would be going through was mentally painful. In Jesus' anguish, Jesus "prayed more earnestly, and his sweat became like great drops of blood falling down on the ground. "(Luke 22:44). While at the intersection of life and death on the cross, Jesus continued ministering to humanity through mental fatigue. First, Jesus asked for the forgiveness of his enemies, (Luke 22:34); Jesus accepted a lawbreaker's request of remembrance though he verbally abused Jesus (Luke 22:42); Jesus cried out to God, "Father, into your hands I commend my spirit." The Johannian account shows Jesus' love for family as he told his mother and disciples to take care of each other. Jesus told Mary, "Woman, behold your son!" (19:26) and to the disciple, "Behold, your mother!" (19:27). After Jesus completed his mission, Jesus said, "I am thirsty." (19:28) and "It is finished!" But before Jesus died, in the Matthew and Mark's account, Jesus' was in an emotional state of abandonment as he cried out, "My God, My God, why have You forsaken me?" (Matthew 27:46; Mark 15:34). Just imagine the emotion of abandonment, being abandoned by your family. Indeed, Jesus' ultimate act of love: sacrificial death is the crux of God's love for humanity.

The burial of Jesus occurred during the high holy season, the Passover, a day before the sabbath. Were people more concerned about preparing and observing religion, than making sure Jesus received a proper funeral? Jesus' corpse was buried, placed in a tomb hastily without the required funeral ritual, no embalmment, no celebration of life, no singing, no dancing, no obituary, no eulogy. There was no inscription on Jesus' tomb: it was unmarked similar to the 381 African Ancestors. By the time the women went to the grave site, Jesus' body was missing. God's messengers asked the women a provoking question, "Why do you look for the living among the dead? He is not here, but has risen" (Luke 24:5) and reminded them of the words Jesus had spoken that He would be crucified by sinners, but would rise on the third day (Luke 24:6).

Faith believes Jesus' lived life of being a mediator of the new covenant and Jesus' finished mission of salvation as a model. In fact, while instructing and comforting believers, Jesus told them "I am the way, and the truth, and the life." (John 14:6). After Jesus' resurrection and ascension Jesus then became the Prototype Ancestor, the Ancestor of all ancestors. African Traditional Religious thought emphasizes ancestor reverence. In his African American religious studies, Professor Maulana Karenga, known as the creator of Kwanzaa, suggested several reasons why the ancestors are venerated: "their contribution in life; as guardians of family traditions and ethics, and because they are viewed as the best group of intermediaries between men and God"[86] From a Ghanaian perspective, noted theologians, John Samuel Pobee and Kwame Bediako advocate a universal view of Jesus within cultural and social context. Within

[86] Gayraud S. Wilmore, ed., *African American Religious Studies: An Interdisciplinary Anthology* (London: Duke University Press, 1989), 273.

this construct, people should "look on Jesus as the Great and Greatest Ancestor"[87] because, "in Akan society the Supreme Being and the ancestors provide the sanctions for the good life, and the ancestors hold that authority as ministers of the Supreme Being."[88]. For Benezet Bujo, a Congolese Catholic theologian based on Jesus' biography, Jesus personifies the model as Ancestor Par Excellence and is "Proto-Ancestor"[89]. Meaning Jesus' life sets the standard for what a quality ancestor is. Jesus our Proto and Greatest Ancestor is amongst the great cloud of witnesses surrounding humans, advocating, and cheering us on. (Hebrew 12:1-2).

When Jesus ascended to the ancestral realm, Jesus had already prepared the disciples and left the divine promise of the Holy Spirit to all believers. Jesus as a great Comforter provided words of encouragement and consolation in a sermon to his followers. In Jesus' message taken from the Johannine account of the Gospel, Jesus told the disciples not to worry, He will go to prepare an eternal home. Jesus talked about oneness with God, stating Jesus is the way, truth, and life. No one gets to God except through Jesus. (14:6) and if one knows Jesus, he/she will also know God since Jesus and God are one. Just as the linguist speaks on behalf of a king, Jesus speaks on behalf of God, not on Jesus' own will. Jesus is the only way to God just like the linguist is the way to the king. But how would humans cooperate with the task of a new life, transformation, and salvation after Jesus' transition? Jesus as a loving advocate asked God for another meditator in His stead, the Holy Spirit.

Grandma's Theology

[87]Kwame Bediako, *Jesus in African Culture: A Ghanaian Perspective* (Accra: Asempa Publishers Christian Council of Ghana, 1998), 12.

[88] John Pobee, *Toward an African Theology* (Nashville Abingdon, 1979), 94. Toward an African theology : Pobee, John S : Free Download, Borrow, and Streaming : Internet Archive

[89] Benezet Bujo, *African Theology in its Social Context in Diane Stinton, Jesus of Africa: Voices of Contemporary African Christology* (Orbis Books, 2004), 15.

The Holy Spirit, Paraclete in Greek, the third person of the Godhead in Trinitarian Theology will continue in the life of humans. For philosopher Richard Smoley, the doctrine of the Holy Spirit, pneumatology, is that like Jesus, the Holy Spirit was created by God and has always existed.[90] After the transition of Jesus, the Holy Spirt fulfilled the divine communication link between God and humans.[91] As a child I often heard my Grandmother, Meme energetically sings which I thought to be three different songs: The first, "The Holy Ghost power moving just like a magnet, movin' here, moving' there, just like the day of Pentecost;" The second, "Fire, fire, fire, fire fall on me. Just like the day of Pentecost fire fall on me" The third "Oh, let the power fall on me, O God. Let the power fall on me. Oh, let the power from heaven fall on me. Let the power fall on me." As Grandma sang, she moved to a purposeful rhythm. At times her feet were stomping, tapping, marching, her hips were swaying, her hands were lifted, and clapping. Grandma's entire body was moving to the melodious beat, dancing with the Spirit. Grandma would be shouting sometimes too. Grandma's Holy Spirit is power, energy and fire moving within and around! Grandma's routine practice was one of spiritual discipline, faithful worship, worshiping her God in spirit and truth (John 4:23-24).

Circle Theology – The Theology of Dr. Mercy Amba Ewudziwa Oduvove

My personal highlight during our trip to Ghana was meeting my Nana Mercy, aka Dr. Mercy Amba Ewudziwa Oduyoye! Nana Mercy is a renowned Ghanian Methodist theologian, educator, writer, poet and mentor currently serving as director of the Institute of African Women in Religion and Culture at Trinity Theological Seminary in Ghana. She is known for her work in African women's theologies and theological anthropology. Nana Mercy is the chief initiator of

[90] Doctrine of the Holy Spirit. 06-holyspirit-final.pdf (reasonablefaith.org)

[91] Ibid.

the Circle of Concerned African Theologians (The Circle) over 30 years ago and also the idea of Circle Theology. The Circle is dedicated to research, publication and supporting African women of the diaspora. The Circle encourages authenticity in writing your own narrative, not the story others expect of you. According to the organization's website, the vision is "to empower African women to contribute their critical thinking and analysis with a view to advance current knowledge. Theology, religion, and culture are the three chosen foci, which must be used as the framework for Circle research and publications."[92] Meeting Nana Mercy was a dream come true, a connection to love theology! When I started my theology of love dissertation over three years ago, the thoughts of circle kept speaking to me. Upon inquiry and research, Nana Mercy popped up. Her pictures reminded me of my first Spiritual Leader, Grandma Adassa. Then I realized I met her over 20 years ago at a WOMB (Women Organizing Mobilizing and Building, Inc.) conference in New York. The words below happened during one of those contemplative moments.

The Dance of Love
There is a dance and a pattern of love
There is a beat and a pattern of love
That makes a dance in the circle of love
Love is a circle
Love is a dance
The circle of love is a continuous beat
It's the beat to the rhythm of life.

The Power of Love
The power of love is a rhythm
The power of love is a dance
The power of love is a beat
The power of love brings healing to a nation
The power of love brings healing to mind, body and soul
The power of love is an interconnecting circle. The joining of two is better than one.

[92] Circle of Concerned African Woman Theologians | (accessed, February 2024).

We met Nana Mercy at the Talitha Qumi Center (TQC) within Trinity Theological Seminary. TQC is a spacious open space which is circular in architectural design. As she entered the space it was as if I were seeing my Grandmother. Yes, Grandma with her graceful slender physique, yet powerful presence. As Nana Mercy walks, she moves to a slow rhythm with the Daughters of Anowa. I imagined her saying, "I am not a mother but, I have children. I am remaining in the delivery room, laboring for their liberation and salvation. I will be there for my Daughters of Anowa throughout eternality." For a more intimate chat, as she took her seat, she insisted we sit in a circle and get close together. During our personal introductions, I asked her permission to call her Nana and she said yes, daughter. Nana's affirming yes ignited my spirit, giving confirmation of kinship. When I engaged Nana in a conversation about love, her narrative response the Trinitarian Christology, one God as three persons: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Nana's theological thinking sees God as liberator of the oppressed, rescuing the marginalized and those suffering. Love for Nana Mercy based on John 3:16, the life of our Proto Ancestor, Jesus Christ. In addition, Nana Mercy believes in embracing all religions, cultures and races working together for the better good. – that's Love.

The Gospel According to Love:

In the beginning was Love and Love was with God, and Love was God. Love was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through Love, and without Love not one thing came into being. What has come into being in Love was life, and the life was the light of all people. Love shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome Love. And Love became a human being and lived among the people. Humans have seen Love's glory, the glory of God's only Child, full of grace, truth, compassion, and justice. God's Child, Love died for the sake of humanity, in order to reestablish a relationship with God. Dying is transitioning into a

new life and creation, meta morphing into the spiritual realm to join the great cloud of witnesses. This is the realm where the ancestors reside. In Christian Theology, God's Child, the only begotten son Jesus Christ, is the protype ancestor whose name is called upon by those who believe. Jesus said, God is Spirit to be reverenced in spirit and truth. God's Spirit is Love. There is One God, One Spirit, One Love.

Social

"The present system under the control of the whites trains the Negro to be white at the same time convinces him of the impropriety or the impossibility of his becoming white… the Negros will have no outlet but to go down a blind alley, if the sort of education which they are now receiving is to enable them to find the way out of their present difficulties." Cater G. Woodson (1895 to 1950).

What was the difference in the family systems of the enslaved -vs- enslaver during the period of 1766-1914? How did the family dynamics change after the Emancipation Proclamation? What are the structures that contribute to differences in the family? What systems, institutions, agencies, and/or organizations are involved, and what specific policies or practices of these structures need changing.

To begin this social aspect on family, I will use the narrative of Maulana Karenga for a deeper understanding of the destructive impact of slavery. He suggests using the term "The Holocaust of Enslavement"[93], as a means to introduce and stress the moral dimension of the tragedy as distinct from its commercial aspect. "For the stress on the commercial aspect of enslavement often denies, ignores, or diminishes the moral monstrousness that this massive destruction of human life, human culture and human possibility represents."[94] Karenga stated that, "A holocaust is an act of genocide so morally monstrous it is not only a crime against a people themselves but also against humanity"[95] It's clear from historical evidence that the

[93]Maulana Karenga, *Introduction to Black Studies, Second Edition* (LA: The University of Sankore Press, 1993), 115.

[94] Ibid.

[95] Ibid.

massive European enslavement of Africans and its accompanying violence destruction and commercial aspect was one of the most catastrophic events in the history of humankind. "This act transforms people into objects and thus engineering their social death"[96] stated Karenga.

Family Love

Family is important theologically and sociologically. Family provides a sense of identity, belonging, support and love. Family is at the center of God's creative love as demonstrated in Genesis. After God created humans, God blessed them and gave them the decree to prosper, reproduce, fill, and subdue the earth. (1:28) To create a union, a man should leave his parents and embrace his wife (2:24). Procreation is essential in building human society. It is essential to understand the enslaved family ideology prior to the shackles of slavery. Sociologist Andrew Billingsley's historical and ethnographic studies on African family reveals a complex and highly advanced motif of strong family and community life as impracticable as that of their captors.[97] Billingsley provided the following distinctive features of African family life: first the emphasis on consanguinity, the concept of descended from the same ancestry verses conjugal, pair married state. Essentially marriage unites two families and a network of extended clan rather than two people. Secondly, the distinctive feature of African family life was grounded in centuries of tradition, ritual, custom and law. Thirdly, family life was highly communal, connected with the rest of society, economically, religiously, and politically verses an individualized pattern. Fourthly, family life placed a strong value on children and reverence and respect held for the

[96] Ibid.

[97] Andrew Billingsley, *Black Families in White America: The 20th Anniversary Edition of A Modern Classic by A Preeminent Afro-American Sociologist* (NY: Simon & Schuster, Inc., 1968), 39.

elderly.[98] The Fifth family structure pattern was heightened during our pilgrimage to Ghana, a matrilineal society verses patrilineal. In a matrilineal society, a woman's children belong to the lineage to which she belongs rather than the father's side. Using me as an example, essentially my siblings and I belong to our mother's lineage which comprises of her father (Beckford) and her siblings birth by the same father. The African family structure was extremely different from the European male descent line dominance. That being so, one can imagine the psychological effect of being cast into an egregious system that totally destroyed all semblance of family connection. Being captured and sold as commodity into slavery was against God design for family to be prosperous and unified in love. Can you imagine seeing your children, spouse, family members, being sold at an auction?

Family is a place of love, comfort, and support. However, slavery totally dismantled and disrupted the continuity of the traditional African family institution. During the mid-eighteenth into the early twentieth centuries, other than captivity versus liberty, the family systems of the enslaved and the enslaver was significantly different. The enslaved family system was likened to an itinerant structure where the plantation was home with restrictions intentionally separating and prohibiting reunification of families. Enslaved rights as human and family were seized, dishonored with no rights: no rights to marriage; no rights to stay together as a unit; no rights to their children since children are property of the enslaver and could be sold without notice; no rights to own property. These statements from former slaves captures the psychosocial and psychological effects caused by the enslaved family system: "If you wants to know what

[98] Ibid.

unhappiness means,",[99] states John Rudd, a former slave whose mother and brothers were sold away, "jess'n you stand on the slave block and hear the auctioneer's voice selling you away from the folk you love."[100] "I never knew a whole family to live together, till all were grown up, in my life," recalls Lewis Clarke of his twenty-five years enslaved in Kentucky."[101] "I don't know where I was born, and I don't know when. I know I am eighty-two or eighty-three years old. The white folks that raised me told me how old I was. I never saw my father and my mother in my life. I don't know nothin.' I'm just an old green man. I don't know none of my kin people — father, mother, uncles, cousins, nothin.' When I found myself the white people had me. Silas Dothrum, enslaved in Arkansas"[102] On the other hand, the enslaver's family was one of freedom and perceived superiority, freedom to continue operating an oppressive structure. Freedom to attend lynching of African Americans as a family event. Freedom to profit economically from slave labor.

However, Africans are resilient and family loving people. There were many enslaved who were determined to keep their families together despite the resistance. Take Harriet Jacobs for example, despite mental abuse, sexual abuse, physical abuse, and other abuses caused by slavery, she demonstrated a mother's preserving love for her children and family which propelled her to freedom. In Harriet's autobiography, she documented incidents in her life as a slave girl. Finally, she ran away rather than seeing her two children as field slaves. She ultimately gained her freedom along with her children and ended up working as an abolitionist.

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[99] National Humanities Center. The Enslaved Family, African American Community during Slavery, African American Identity: Vol. I, 1500-1865, Primary Resources in U.S. History and Literature, Toolbox Library, National Humanities Center (accessed October 27, 2023).

[100] Ibid.

[101] Ibid.

[102] Ibid.

However, there were instances where mothers chose the path of ending their children's life rather than subjecting them to a traumatic life of slavery, as seen in the character of Sethe, Nobel Prize winning author, Toni Morrison's retelling of Margaret Garner's in her Novel, Beloved.

The road to eradicate slavery is a process, where mentally it, will take generations to recover fully. Families' dynamics had undergone major transitions during the end of legalized slavery in America. Andrew Billingsley coins the pivotal period after the Emancipation Proclamation of 1863 and the movement against slavery, shadows of the plantation in which African American families cope in White America's systems.[103] Ideologically, the systemic oppressive structures Billingsley defined as social forces, is the legacy of slavery impacting the African American as well as the White family life. Two notable events these social forces are seen in were the factors of industrialization and urbanization, which set the condition for family lives.[104] Billingsley identified mobility in the context of geography, families were migrating from rural south to urban north, and socially, the socioeconomic structure shifted from being an underclass.

From a sociopolitical aspect, there were more restrictive laws and regulations established to limit African American's liberty. Policies[105] such as Gradual Abolition Act, Fugitive Slave Act, Black Codes, Civil Rights Act, Segregation, Poll Tax, and Jim Crow influenced the family structures economically, politically, and socially. As a result of these inequalities, families embarked on a movement of equal rights for African Americans.

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[103] Andrew Billingsley, *Black Families in White America: The 20th Anniversary Edition of A Modern Classic By Preeminent Afro-American Sociologist* (NY: Simon & Schuster 1988), 72.

[104] Ibid, 72-78.

[105] Lerone Bennett, Jr. *Before The Mayflower: A History of Black America, Fifth Edition* (Johnson Publishing Company, Inc. 1982).

In addition to policies there were institutions created and rejuvenated after the Emancipation Proclamation (1863) and the end of the Civil War (1865) period. White supremacy organizations such as the Ku Kluk Klan[106] were created as a means of resistance to African Americans progress towards freedom and equality. Furthermore, the prison and law enforcement systems are results from "Shadows of the Plantation" anatomy. For example, the use of a numbering system to identify prisoners is like the plantation system. Best Selling Author Walter Mosley highlights this practice in his book entitled #47[107]. It tells about the life of an orphaned teenage slavey boy who was giving a dead slave's number #47 for identification. His mother died after giving birth and he don't know who his father is. It's a story of plantation life, the overseer work, and the essence of freedom. Another force is the policing system which stems from the U.S. Marshals, the oldest U.S. Federal Law Enforcement Agency. which was established in 1789[108]. A key task for the agency was fugitive operations, the recovery of people fleeing from custody. During that time, it was geared towards the recovery of fugitive slaves. With that said, currently the penitentiary system instituted harsh conditions including long laborious manual hours for prisoners. In which the population surpassed 30,000 by 1880 and with African American became the majority of inmates, according to historical insights prison life 1865-1900.[109] Also, the police force which was initially publicly funded and organized, 1835 in many ways replaced the overseer role of a slave master. In consideration of the shadows of these systems, there are movements to reform criminal justice, police, and prison institutions.

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[106] Lerone Bennett, Jr. *Before The Mayflower: A History of Black America, Fifth Edition* (Johnson Publishing Company, Inc. 1982), 231

[107] Walter Mosley, *#47* (

[108] US Marshals Service. https://www.usmarshals.gov/who-we-are/history

[109]Historical Insights, Prison Life—1865 to 1900 - Ancestry Insights

However, how can a people survive and thrive in a system that was intentionally created with them as an underclass? In the NBC News article regarding the disparities, the CEO of a national organization that trains People of Color to become political leaders stated that, "The system wasn't built to protect Black people."[110] "And until we get to the root cause of policing and police brutality and the differences in the way police treat Black folks versus white folks, we're not going to get to change."[111] "Until we get to policies that dismantle the system that exists, we're not going to see this stop."[112] "We can say, Things have changed because the national dialogue is changing. However, "Until we get to policies that dismantle the system that exists,"[113] "we're not going to see this stop."[114] When we get to the crux of the problem, such as the shadows of slavery, change will come.

The Story of 14-year-old Sarah Ann

She was a teenage girl, just like Mary, the mother of Jesus. She was a teenager, just like Prophetess Kimpa Vita when she started the Anthonian prophetic movement to liberate the Kingdom of Kongo. She was a teenage girl, just like Harriet Jacobs when she gave birth to her two children. She was a teenage girl, just like my granddaughter and niece, who I was their guardian. She was a teenager, just like the junior high students I encouraged during Career Day. She was a teenager, just like Marley Dias founder of #1000BlackGirlBooks, a campaign she initiated to collect books featuring Black female protagonists.[115] She was a teenager, just like

[110] Curtis Burn, "Black People Are Still Killed by Police at a Higher Rate Than Other Groups*" NBC News*, March 3, 2023. Report: Black people are still killed by police at a higher rate than other groups (nbcnews.com)

[111] Ibid.

[112] Ibid.

[113] Ibid.

[114] Ibid.

[115] Marley Dias About Me. https://www.marleydias.com/about/ (accessed February 20, 2024).

the Elizabeth High School student who created the portrait of her Grandma. Teenager is a stage of developing identity and relationships. Adolescents go through puberty, resulting in physical, mental, and social changes. What was the life of fourteen-year-old Sarah Ann? Sarah Ann commanded my attention while I was researching the 381 names for the Ancestors Speak monument. The project at hand was a comparative analysis between the burial book information and a spreadsheet listing, which I at first thought to be a simple task. Of the 381 ancestors most are listed with full names (first and last), but a significant amount is listed as unknown. However, "Col'd girl" Sarah Ann, whose cause of death is listed as "burned to death," demanded my full attention. There were other unknown children who were burned to death, but Sarah Ann took me into a state of lamentation. For hours I was bawling, weeping uncontrollably, wailing. Even while taking a shower with the running water, I was sobbing with tears flowing into the water. Just like streams of living water flowing outside of me. What caused Sarah Ann to burn to death? Was her death intentional? Was she raped? "Sexual brutality was imposed on enslaved African women, men and children. Each was subjected to the sexual lust and exploitation of the master and his family. Breeding and rape became the two principal forms of sexual abuse and brutality which they all suffered, but especially the women"[116] What happened? Who were her parents? Another research source, Find a Grave an online database, provided Sarah's last name as Haviland along with more information: *pauper, colored girl at Luke Haviland, burned by explosion of campfire and buried 7/29/1846, about six paces northwest of Peter Van Horn.*[117] Sarah was considered to be property of Luke Haviland and based on New Jersey's Gradual

[116] Maulana Karenga, *Introduction to Black Studies, Second Edition* (LA: The University of Sankore Press, 1993), 123.

[117] https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/241796302/sarah-ann-haviland (accessed June 2023).

Abolition Act; Sarah would not have been freed until the age of twenty-one. She was at the mercy of her enslaver who considered her to be his personal property. Even more grievously, Sarah's identity has been concealed and knowing the enslaver's name provides the pathway to discovering her essence. Sarah's name means princess, beautiful, noble, and is a name given in the Haviland linage. Sarah. Similar to Princess Sarah Forbes Bonetta, who was born in West Africa 1843, Sarah's name is Princess, and so Sarah Ann must have been a lovely girl with a significant link to the Haviland's family. Was Luke Haviland Sarah's father? Interestingly his Mother's name was also Sarah. Was Sarah Ann in an abusive environment similar to Harriet Jacobs? What we do know is, Sarah Ann was burned to death!

What could have caused Sarah Ann Haviland to die by a campfire explosion? Sarah Ann compelled me to go deeper in research and directed me to the New Jersey Historical Society. There, with the help of an expert researcher, we discovered an article in The Sun, Baltimore Newspaper, Sunday, August 8. 1846 "*Burn to dead a colored girl living in the family of Mr. Luke Haviland of Elizabethtown, NJ was burnt to death a few days since by bursting of a can of spirit gas."*[118] Then another article from the New Jersey Journal, Tuesday, August 4, 1846, "*On Monday evening of last week, a colored girl, about 14 years old, residing with Mr. Luke Haviland, was burned to death by the bursting of a can containing spirit Gas, which took fire while she was filling the lamp. It appears that she raised the socket from the lamp and left the wick burning, and then attempted to pour the Gas from the can into the lamp, and in so doing the Gas in the can caught fire, which exploded and instantly set her clothes in a blaze, and before*

[118] Sun_1846-08-08_[1] - The Sun, Baltimore, Maryland.

assistance could be rendered, she was so terribly burned that she died within a few hours thereafter."[119]

Even these reported stories of Sarah Ann's horrific death are specious. Why wasn't there anyone to assist her during this tragic moment? Surely Sarah Ann was calling out for help like she called out to me. Sarah died with no one to honor her life. The news articles had no mention of Sarah Ann's name or any funeral announcement. Sarah's identity was just as a colored girl whose life ended on her 50-year-old enslaver's property. Conversely, when Sarah Ann's enslaver died 25 years later, the story was quite different. "*Haviland. -- At Elizabeth, on Monday October 30. Luke Haviland, in the 75th year of his age. Relatives and friends are respectfully invited to attend the funeral, from his late residence…*"[120] Yet, another announcement was in the local paper on Wednesday, November 1, 1871, indicating the funeral of an old citizen. Luke Haviland was a shoe dealer on Broad Street and a sexton at SHFPC and he died in the comfort of his son, a Captain. Sarah Ann was shamefully buried but her enslaver was respectfully buried.

After several visits to the Historical Society, I went to the Elizabeth Public Library's History and Special Collections Department in my quest to get to know Sarah Ann. With more extensive research with the library team, more details about Luke's family were found mother, father, grandparents, children, siblings, and other family members. And while I received the following message from the library staff, "We know from census records that he was a shoemaker / dealer and had a store on Broad Street. He is related to the Winans family, which is a prominent family from Elizabethtown and possibly also the Price family. You may also want to

[119] Tue_1846-04-08_[1] - Journal, Elizabeth, New Jersey

[120] New_York_Herald_1871-11-01_8

see if you can get his mother's will and any periphery family members (uncles) to see where the slaves may have come from,"[121] I received this message regarding Sarah Ann, "This I honestly cannot answer. I know of the practice of taking on the family surname, but not sure about the first name. I hit a brick wall trying to find any information about Sarah and where she potentially came from, parents, etc."[122] I will close this case for now. Sarah Ann is with the ancestors interceding and speaking up for teenage girls. Over 100 years after her death, Sarah Ann was amongst the cloud of witnesses who took us home to Africa, January 2024.

[121] Email from Elizabeth Public Library dated 1/23/24.

[122] Ibid.

CHAPTER 6
MINISTERAL COMPETENCIES

The Process

The Ministerial Competency Assessment Instrument document was used as guidance for the evaluation of the fourteen proficiencies. Of the six qualifying words used for rating (no basis, skip, start, attention, develop and continue), three were identified in the process. Eight competencies were pointed out for continue, Six for develop and two for attention. The competencies rating is as follows:

Continue -- Leader, Religious/Spiritual Educator, Spiritual Leader, Spiritual Cultural Proficiency, Counselor, Administrator, Professional, Evangelist. These competencies rate high in performance.

Develop -- Pastor, Ecumenist, Financial Management, Theologian, Preacher, Prophetic Agent. These competencies show strength but need to hone and smoothed over in order to develop further or excel.

Attention – Worship Leader, Technology/Social Media Management. This points to an area where special attention is needed, especially in light of a particular ministry in which to engage. It may be that the person was never provided an opportunity to develop competency, but it could also be that a person's characteristics (mood, temperament, commitment, or problem) interfere with the development and execution of the competency.

During a site team meeting, Friday September 22, 2023, the team members and I agreed on three competencies that will be developed through the Demonstration Project. Cultural Awareness, Religious Spiritual Educator and Prophetic Agent were identified as proficiencies that would enhance engagement within the set community. The feedback from the site team is provided in the commentary below.

Culture Awareness

Sensitive to the world view of other cultures.

Primrose serves on the ministerial staff at Agape Tabernacle International Fellowship. Every year her church hosts Community Day and other events that engage the community. Agape is located in the Canarsie section of Brooklyn, NY that is largely a Caribbean community. During these events, the church leaves the church building and goes into the streets to share the love of God and provide resources that address the community's personal issues which are many.

Primrose operates with ease during these events having knowledge of the African/ Caribbean cultural diaspora and her own cultural maturity. She takes the initiative to engage the community and listen to their concerns. Of course, community members have a host of opinions about the church and its impact. Primrose represents the ethic of love that her project addresses. It is clear that if you are called to ministry, you must be faithful and you must LOVE the people. Primrose loved people, which is evident in her community engagement. I have witnessed her care for people. I have witnessed her cultural proficiency/ awareness/humility in action. I have witnessed community members being impacted by the power of love.

Cultural awareness is a clear strength for Primrose. Her self-awareness, ability to identify culturally sensitive practices and her respect and ability in cross cultural interactions has been well demonstrated with her demonstration project and in her interactions with the site team. It is my impression that she is highly successful in being inclusive and accepting of other cultures and their world view.

Primrose's sensitivity to the differences and similarities between two cultures when communicating or interacting with members of other cultural groups is evident. Through Theology of Love, and having been birthed in a Jamaican heritage and having this cross-cultural

sensitivity or cultural awareness, is the knowledge, and acceptance of other cultures and others' cultural identities. Her relativity of the skills needed for effective communication with people of other cultures, includes cross-cultural competency and supports and the understanding that to be culturally aware is to understand that cultural differences do exist and to be sensitive to and respect those differences when interacting with people whose customs and worldview may be different from our own. The 313+ Going Home Ghana Pilgrimage provided another opportunity to bear witness to The Theology of Love in Ghana and seeing how the Ghanaian cultural community revealed the value of family. There is probably no society in which the family does not play an essential role. The Ghanaian emphasize communal values such as family, respect for the elderly, honoring traditional rulers, and the importance of dignity and proper social conduct, and that's Love.

Religious/Spiritual Educator

A religious educator challenges the hearer to discover new resources within her or himself and others. He or she invites others to a new and more spiritually enlightened consciousness about self and society. With creativity and courage, he or she prompts us to ask new questions and work toward healing, reconciliation, and justice. Such a challenge elicits personal growth in the gifts of the Spirit, which in turn overflow into the life of the community.

Primrose is an active member of Women Organizing, Mobilizing and Building Inc. (WOMB), a faith-based organization comprised of clergy and lay women working cooperatively to address and resolve mutual concerns within the home, church, and community. The organization addresses the spiritual, physical, emotional, mental, and fiscal health of women and their families.

Through the WOMB Circle of Women's Economic Development, Primrose has been able to exercise her educational gifts, talents, skills, and abilities. She has been able to put to use her teaching tools by conducting educational workshops on financial health and wealth. We all would agree that money, or the lack of, has a direct impact on all aspects of health. The stress associated with financial distress impacts how you function in ministry. Primrose provided workshops on budgeting, debt, credit, tithing, saving, seeding, seedtime and harvest, and more. She challenged us to think, which is what a great teacher does. She challenged us to change, which is what a great teacher does. Yes, she did it with love and sensitivity which is what a great teacher does.

Primrose absolutely meets this competency. Primrose's ability to communicate and connect with people is exceptional. As a member of the site team - I felt that she was inclusive, explained concepts well and thoroughly, was patient, understanding and clear in her communications. I thought the Labyrinth Demonstration Project was a showcase of her ability to involve and inspire people to participate thoughtfully and with grace. I learned a few things about myself from that project and Primrose's guidance.

Love as a spiritual practice is/was demonstrated during the 313+Ancestors Speak Project. The biblical principles of love of self, love of neighbor, and love of God has provided Primrose with the educational tool designed to foster contemplation and spiritual transformation through a sacred labyrinth walk. In addition, the community was educated through the love shared while interacting while pouring sand into a large glass vessel choosing colors that represent love overflowing. The Ancestors Speak Project overall illuminates integrative learning experience designed to address theological reflection, historical clarity, cultural proficiency, and ministerial and community leadership.

Prophetic Agent

Prophecy in the Bible is more than a matter of ecstatic speech uttered through the power of the Spirit (although it is this), and much more than merely telling the future (although it certainly has a strong eschatological dimension). A prophet is one who does not "foretell" so much as "forthtell" the truth. As a prophet, a minister speaks the truth in love, communicates an awareness of social injustices, and sensitizes others to spiritual and ethical implications of various structures and practices in the church/synagogue/mosque/religious community, and in the wider society.

The characteristics of a prophetic agent include a commitment to the transformation of the world, sensitivity to and/or empathy with the victims of social injustice, and an ability to communicate to others a passion for justice to inspire change and more. Primrose is committed to the transformation of the world of incarcerated women, and how the narrative of incarcerated women and girls is written and spoken. Women who are incarcerated are still human beings, not to be defined by the crimes they have committed. Incarcerated women are easily made invisible behind the walls in prisons across this country. Primrose reached out to me to support the graduation of the inaugural class at Bedford Hills Correctional Facility because of her commitment to the transformation of the world of incarceration women. The women were celebrated for their achievement. It was a powerful moment which I was blessed and honored to observe. Primrose saw the women in their humanity, and not as the crimes they committed. Changed, women not scarlet, stained criminals beyond redemption, and transformation. Primrose showed the love that redeems and transforms. One love for all.

Primrose demonstrates this competency beautifully. The selection of the 313+ Ancestors Speak Project is a wonderful example of her willingness to "change the world" through a

commitment to social justice, creating social change, and building community to facilitate the change. Primrose's positive energy and enthusiasm is infectious and inspiring. I feel blessed to be a part of this journey with Primrose and the rest of the site team.

Prophecy is the supernatural ability to awaken the hearts and the minds of the people into their true God given purpose and identity. Primrose understands that this is the power that renews hope with the courage to change a person's much needed course of direction. She is genuinely involved in the social, economic, and political realities of the community. It is done with a spirit of excellence and love. Prophetic Agent – Prophecy is the supernatural ability to awaken the hearts and the minds of the people into their true God given purpose and identity. Primrose understands that this is the power that renews hope with the courage to change a person's much needed course of direction. She is genuinely involved in the social, economic, and political realities of the community; it is done with a spirit of excellence and love. Prophetic Agent – Prophecy is the supernatural ability to awaken the hearts and the minds of the people into their true God given purpose and identity. Primrose understands that this is the power that renews hope with the courage to change a person's much needed course of direction. She is genuinely involved in the social, economic, and political realities of the community; it is done with a spirit of excellence and love.

CHAPTER 7
LOVE NEVER ENDS

The Journey Continues

A Theology of Love: A Sankofa Model started with the challenge to create a "Theology of Love" and an educational model focusing on honoring the forgotten while strengthening family and community relationships. This theological journey was never about just reaching a goal but rather a transformational pursuit of Love in an attempt to reconcile historical incongruency. In this case, of those who were enslaved and the enslavers. This is with an understanding that all of God's Creation are created equally and have inherent rights of life, liberty, and pursuit of happiness. Theological, the ramification of how religion have been used as an oppressive mechanism and how we can begin to reverse some of the damage which are deeply rooted in our heritage. This results in thinks that need to be uprooted and unmask in order to reveal truth and bring about change. The dissertation uncovers misconceptions and mistruths based on one's experience and historical lens. We must continue to tell the truth, tell our stories.

The Journey to Love model provides a framework, a practical and usable tool for communal conversation, meditation, reflection, unity, and love. An aim is to reconcile with God, self, and others. Once an individual knows their true identity, they are better able to embrace God, self, and community in the spirit of one love. As a next step, we will work on refining this educational model. We will continue on by seeking opportunities to utilize the model as a

transformational tool. And to build in an assessment and feedback feature which will be used to modify the process. This will also include upgrading it technologically.

We will be more intentional and consistent in the use of social media as a means of truth telling and love stories. Currently there is a "Theology of Love" Facebook page which will be enhanced.

The wise one said there is nothing new under the sun, but there is knowledge to gain and emphasized. This dissertation give prominence to several theological philosophies. First and most important to Love Theology, Loveology, is God is Love. God is a Spirit and Energy force of Love. Human Beings are compelled to Love: love God, love self and love neighbor. Secondly, is Ancestral Theology, Ancestorology, Jesus Christ is the Proto Ancestor or Greatest Ancestor. The life's teaching of Jesus Christ is the way believers and followers' model. So, as the humanity of Jesus Christ died, the spirit was transitioned into the ancestorial realm. Human beings are surrounded by ancestors who are interceding in our daily lives. Thirdly, the ancestors, the great cloud of witnesses speak and provide guidance for us to be enlightened and act. Fourthly, African History and Theology, Africology, as a means of learning, understanding, and knowing identity. Fifthly, Circle Theology, Circleology, the Theology of Dr. Mercy Amba Ewudziwa Oduyoye. The love mission of empowerment and advancing women of the diaspora. Sixthly, Grandma Theology, Grandmaology, upholding the wisdom, teachings, honor, and respect of Grandmas.

There is a charge to arise. Turn our minds to know and remember the history from which we came and apply it to our hearts for understanding our true nature. Let's call out for insight and cry aloud for understanding in the creation of a community where there is life, liberty, and happiness for all. Our history matters and will not be erased. Let us search for, discover, and

recover those hidden treasure and teach them: teach history, teach reconciliation, teach healing, teach love. Love is a continuous journey. Love God. Love Self. Love Neighbors.

APPENDIX

THE THEOLOGY OF LOVE: THE FAMILY GUARDIAN

BY

PRIMROSE SINCLAIR HAMMOND

A DEMONSTRATION PROJECT PROPOSAL

New York Theological Seminary

December 2021

Challenge Statement

While ministering at a Jesus-centered faith community in Canarsie Brooklyn, New York challenged by the effects of COVID-19, the traditional family structure continues to shift impacting the lives of its followship and the centrality of the family construct necessitating a new paradigm of love creating a deeper understanding and strengthening of the modern family motif.

This demonstration project will create an educational model utilizing the theology of love to reflect, refocus, reconnect, reimagine, repurpose, and restrengthen family relationships.

Table of Contents

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION TO THE SETTING .1

A Divine Interruption .1

The Ancestors Speaks .3

313 Ancestors Speak Project .3

Pivotal Moments .5

Listen to the Youth .5

The Darkroom .5

A Mother's Tears 6

Listen to the Elders 7

Grandma, Mom, and Me 7

Jesus Centered Faith Center (JCFC) 9

Canarsie Brooklyn, New York 15

Fenced Area Farmland to Residential Community 15

From Native American to West Indians American Families 15

CHAPTER 2

ANALYSIS OF THE CHALLENGE 19

Challenge Statement 19

Love Matters 19

Family Matters 22

Community in Crisis 24

Identity Crisis 24

Leadership Matters 25

Family Under Construction 27

Generation to Generation 28

Tension between the Generations 28

An iGeneration Family Prayer 28

iIdeas 29
The Strength of African American families 29
Family Daily Ritual – Prayer 29
CHAPTER 3
RESEARCH QUESTIONS 32
Historical 32
Humanity 33
Biblical 34
God's Love Story 34
Theological 37
Love 37
CHAPTER 4
PLAN OF IMPLEMENATION 38
Goals/Strategies/Evaluations 1 – 3 38
CHAPTER 5
MINISTERIAL COMPETENCIES 41
Technology/Social Media Management 42
Cultural Proficiency 43
Leadership 44
APPENDIXES
APPENDIX A: PROJECT TIME 49
APPENDIX B: BUDGET 50
APPENDIX C: SALES OF SERVANTS ADVERTISEMENT 50
APPENDIX D: 1865 COURT ORDER OF PUBLIC WHIPPINGS 50
APPENDIX E & F: CANARSIE PIER THEN AND NOW 50
APPENDIX G: NATURAL MYSTIC LYRIC 50
APPENCIX H: WHAT GENERATION ARE YOU MATRIX 52
BIBLIOGRAPHY 53

CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION TO THE SETTING

There's a natural mystic blowin' through the air
If you listen carefully now you will hear (Robert Nesta Marley, 1945 - 1981)

A Divine Interruption

March 2020 when the coronavirus pandemic COVID-19 surfaced in the United States of America who would have thought it would have had such a drastic effect on our lives. COVID-19 is the most unprecedented global issue human beings have faced in decades. When the pandemic was declared in the USA, there were two significant religious observations: Purim (March 9 – 10) the Jewish nation's celebration of their deliverance in fifth century BCE as told in the book of Esther. And secondly, Christians were in the midst of Lent (February 19 – April 11) a time of preparation, focus on Jesus Christ's sacrifice on the cross and the miracle of Jesus's resurrection. In the midst of these sacred events, a crown infection (coronavirus) interrupted normality and created a society shift. The distractions of men, women, boys, and girls from God were shut down: sport events were suspended, and stadiums closed; civic centers, theaters and even the global economy were on a downward spiral. Now physical distancing, six feet apart, is the new rule along with separation from community and cleansing of self.

The doors of the churches are closed to reaffirm the real church is within people not a cathedral. With the government's stay home order, people are forced to be at home and spend time with family and increase relationship with God. The scripture 2Chronicles 7:14 became even more popular as people were being humbled, praying, repenting, turning from evil ways and seeking God in hope that God will hear, forgive, and heal the land.

Yet, the 1977 lyrics of Robert Nester Marley's "Natural Mystic" echoes in the atmosphere. As I kept hearing this prophetic song rewinding and reverberating in my ears, I contemplated the moment of what's going on. "Many more will have to suffer, many more will have to die, Don't ask me why." The impact of COVID-19 is devastating and based on the World Health Organization (WHO)[123] and the Center for Disease and Prevention (CDC)[124] worldwide the cases and deaths are in the millions. Yes, families are suffering and dying:

Global – over 251,000,000 cases and 5,000,000 plus deaths
USA – over 47,000,000 cases and 761,000 plus deaths
New York – over 2,600,000 cases and 58,400 plus deaths

Covid-19 is the deadliest pandemic in the United State history resulting in the third cause of death in 2020 with heart disease and cancer leading out.[125] This is a wakeup call for all believers to truly be the Church and focus on what's really important, the higher calling to love God and our neighbor as ourselves. The timing of COVID-19 is a universal call to the spiritual law of divine love which is demonstrated by establishing relationships. What really matters in such a time as this? We can heed Moses' message to a nation of rebellious people, Hear, O people! The Lord is our God; the Lord is one! And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might (Deuteronomy 6:4-5). We can channel the Protestant Reformer, Martin Luther example of love during the sixteen-century bubonic plague where over 30% of the population in Wittenberg died. Similar to now students and

[123] Coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic. Retrieved November 8, 2021, Coronavirus disease (COVID-19) (who.int)

[124]COVID-19. Retrieved November 8, 2021, Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) | CDC

[125] Ibid.

teachers were told to leave classrooms for virtual learning.[126] Although Martin Luther could have left the city, he stayed instead and continued his work of ministry teaching, preaching, advising the government, and attending to the sick and marginalized. And in the midst of it all, in a nation seeking comfort in distress, he wrote a great hymn of the church, "A Mighty Fortress Is Our God" which is based on Psalm 46. Likewise, in this war against COVID-19, we also must turn to God, find strength in the holy scripture and trust in the promises of God. God is indeed our refuge and strength, therefore, we as believers must not fear in this time of crisis. God will deliver us from COVID-19 as we continue to honor the Lord and manifest love. What melody will we write and sing during this time of pandemic?

The Ancestors Speak

A people without the knowledge of their past history, origin and culture is like a tree without roots. (Marcus Mosiah Garvey. 1887 – 1940)

During the world health crisis of Covid-19 and social injustice pandemic, a theology of love moved me towards a quest for love, echoing "Love Matters". Indeed, this is a fascinating journey since love is such a complex and irrational emotional behavior which is experienced differently by people. I had a Sankofa moment, to go back in search of my roots in order to move forward on a dissertation on love. At first, this love pursuit directed me to a graveyard at the Siloam-Hope Presbyterian Church in Elizabeth, New Jersey. I was first invited to take part in ACTS, Authentic Communities Transforming Spiritually Bible study. A group leader was need for the action of love which aligned with my theology of love project. I further became aware of two prominent landmarks on SHFPC's campus directly associated with the church. Along with the historic Old Academy School building also known as Snyder Academy of Elizabethtown, the

[126] Albert Culver, "A Mighty Fortress" Lutheran Reformation, October 1, 2015, https://lutheranreformation.org/history/a-mighty-fortress/ (accessed March 20, 2020).

church's graveyard, Old First Cemetery, which is the resting place for New Jersey's founding families and Revolutionary War soldiers according to the church's website.[127] Buried along with these dignitaries are free and enslaved African ancestors. With over 2,000 headstones dating from the late 1600 to 1917, visitors are able to take a walking tour of the burial ground and see who is laid to rest there as well as when they were buried. However, there are over 313 unidentified African ancestors buried in unmarked graves and need to be remembered.[128]

The unknown deceased are children, women, men -- families from a diverse age range. But why are these graves without a marker to identify the family members? Is there a hidden mystery yet to be revealed? These are some of the questions "What's the 313 The Ancestors Speak" initiative is discovering with mission to honor these unknown families. Through awareness and fundraising the hope is to create a memorial.

While engaging in the 313 Ancestors Speak project, I was driven to learn more about my family ancestries. I apprehended the connection from the continents of Africa, Europe, and Americas – Ghana West Africa, Jamaica West Indies, and the United States of America New York/New Jersey. So, this project was initially a retrospective journey to an era of colonialization in search of love. A love voyage that invoked the question, why look for the living among the dead? This inquiry stirred up the hope of the ancestors' love of family. A love to be resurrected. A love that empowers and transforms lives. A love that learns and remembers family stories and rituals.

[127] Siloam Hope First Presbyterian Church (shfpchurch.org) (accessed April 27, 2021).

[128] Ibid.

Pivotal Moments

Listen to the Youth – The Voice of the Youths

It was after midnight when I heard footsteps up the stairs. Brendan, my 23 years old son came in the room and sat in the chair. As dark as it was, he sat there in need of my attention. What's up son? I asked. The response sparked a conversation through daybreak. I listen as he recalled his childhood story through young adulthood in grief and sorrow and as I listened, his emotional pain became my discomfort, I felt the enormous responsibility failure of parenting as my motherly inner emotion attentively heeded the voice of my son. He stood for the voices of the 21st Century youths whose parents learned to be at work making a living and building careers while encouraging family relationships is shortchanged, at least at home. Not feeling the psychological presence of love at home resulted in distress within the family structure. Yes, we supplied his physical needs and wants, but there was a void emotionally. A sense of love and belonging have been negatively affected. What happened to the happy child who has been the life of family gatherings? Who on September 6, 2009, at 11 years old authored "the darkroom" poem:

I go inside the darkroom
He's by my side
I go inside the darkroom
Oh my God
I go inside the darkroom
He's by my side
Jesus is by my side
He is there, He is there
Jesus is always there

Our midnight son/mother talk turned into a sunrise walk in the park and now, "the darkroom" takes on a different meaning and a query as to why go into the darkroom? The images being developed in the darkroom were fragmented rather than the wholeness I once thought. It is the dark loneliness syndrome, internalizing and keeping a lot inwardly because the external world does not understand. So, there is a struggle to find people who really understand without judgement. This experience was a pause moment for me to reflect and refocus on family relationships.

A Mother's Tears

The emphasis of the family need of a love that is present echoed through the voice of the elders. It was during the weekend of August 13, 2021, a celebratory time for the family as children, youths, elderly family members, friends and other dignitaries traveled from throughout the country, Jamaica, and Canada to witness an historic moment. We gathered on the very same Courthouse Grounds in Leesburg where our ancestors were bound, auctioned, sold, and whipped publicly. Where women, men and child's servants were dispose of at public sale. However, 400 years after my ancestor's captivity and enslavement in the Commonwealth of Virginia, I stood in the footsteps of my ancestors witnessing God's faithfulness to a generation of believers, with esteem honor I witnessed my baby sister, "Lorrie Sinclair Taylor, a daughter of Jamaican immigrants, became the first black judge in Loudoun history when the General Assembly elected her to District Court bench in 2020."[129] The Honorable Judge Lorrie Sinclair Taylor has been hearing cases since then; however, due to the pandemic her formal investiture ceremony was celebrated over a year later on Friday, August 13, 2021! The courtroom became a sacred ground

[129] Renss Greene, "Sinclair Taylor, Loudoun's First Black Judge, Celebrated," *LoudounNow, Vol. 6, No 39*, August 19, 2021.

as prayers and song were offered up and the silent praise of a mother turned into tears of joy. This was the very first time, I witnessed my mother's cry. Mom's private weeping for her children has turned into communal joy of thanksgiving to God as her grandsons sitting beside her embraced her. Her emotions did not need comfort because she has witnessed God's faithfulness to family prayers. The same earnest prayers that brought a son through over 20 years of imprisonment. Furthermore, amongst political, religious, and other community leaders, Brendan spoke on behalf of the family about his aunt's zeal and passion in the work she does. Surely our father, Wesley Sinclair, is smiling from above and brother Valentine who made his transition at the start of the pandemic is cheering with the cloud of witnesses.

Listen to the Elders

This was indeed a happy family reunion and a time to catch up with family members. And so, I took the opportunity to sit at the table amongst the elders. My mother, Ena Sinclair, Uncle Johnny, Cousin Cynthia, Auntie Iris all over the age of eighty. "I love you," I said to Aunt Iris and Cousin Cynthia, the matriarchs of the family. Their response inflicted the same pain felt during my conversation with my young son. "NO, you don't love." resonated. "But I do," I said. "Why do you think I don't?" "If you do, you don't show it, because you don't have time for anyone, you are always too busy – you don't even visit me...," my aunt said. Once again, I intently listened to a story of neglected love in the family, a love that is present and visible a love language of quality time.

Grandmas, Mom, and Me

In the 1960s many Jamaicans emigrated to Britain, United States of America, and Canada for socioeconomic reasons. This included my parents. My dad, Wesley Sinclair, migrated to Britain before I was born in 1962 and my mom journeyed to the United States in 1964. As a

result of my parents' migration in quest for a better quality of life for the family, my siblings and I were left in the care of our grandmothers, and we were raised on grandmothers' theology.

My relationship with God began as a child where my grandmothers: Adassa Walters (maternal) "Aunt Mamie" and Lolita Brady (paternal) "Meme," instilled within me the spiritual disciplines of daily bible reading, prayer, fasting, studying, meditation, solitude, service, and corporate worship. These spiritual practices are the path to my spiritual growth, and they help to develop my transformative relationship with God.[130] This transformation challenges and empowers me to live a purposeful lifestyle of love. Prayer for example was the first act and last act of the day. As I arose early in the morning as the sun rises, I gave God thanks. As I kneeled down at nights to pray, I asked God for protection and guidance. At grandma's bedside, on bended knees, eyes closed, hands in praying position we prayed the popular traditional 18th century children prayer, *now I lay me down to sleep I pray the Lord my soul to keep. If I should die before I wake, I pray to God my soul to take. If I should live for another day, I pray the Lord to guide my ways. God Bless momma, papa, etc. Amen.* Additionally, memorization of scriptures such as the 23rd Psalm was a daily practice.

These divine values were further taught to me by my mother and resonate in my soul to this day. Like her mother, my mom is a prayer warrior and a disciplined and respectful daughter of God who although an Ordained Elder in the Presbyterian Church, prefers the role of hospitality/usher which she is currently doing at the age of 83 in retirement in Jamaica West Indies. Mom's silent prayers touch the heart of God and move mountains. It was Mom's relationship with God that allowed her to leave her home and journey to a foreign land of the United States of America in the 1960s. She worked for several years and accumulated enough

[130] Richard J. Foster, *Celebration of Discipline: The Path to Spiritual Growth*, rev. ed. (San Francisco: Harper & Row, ©1988), 7.

funds to bring her six (6) children and husband too. Many other family members and friends came to America through her generosity. My mother exemplifies the virtuous Proverbs 31 woman! There never seems to be any lack in her household and she has a generous heart that gives abundantly. Through these phenomenal women a spirit of love transcends to the ministry of helps wherever they resided. Aunt Mamie was a quiet and reserved United Methodist, but her powerful presence was evident in her silence. The traditional hymns and Psalms were her favorite inspirations. However, Meme was the opposite. Her mouth was boisterous and powerful as she praised her God. She was a founding member of Emmanuel Faith Church of God, a holiness, hand clapping, dancing, and shouting church in Jamaica West Indies. She was known for her passion for God, family, and God's people as she baked and cooked for the community. She did not like no "dead church" and one of her favorite sayings was "fire for you," meaning you are going to hell if you don't change your ways. Through my foremothers I experienced the formalities of Methodist, Presbyterian, and Fire Baptizing Holiness religious traditions of God the Father.

Jesus-Centered Faith Community

The call to love starts with God, self, and family. And birth from the WOMB, a grassroot organization by the name of Women, Organizing, Mobilizing and Building, Inc. this Jesus-Centered Faith Community (JCFC) was formed over 21 years ago. Located in the Canarsie section of Brooklyn, New York JCFC has been upholding the simple yet profound practices of putting God first and loving people to life, family by family. Putting God first is a key standard for disciples within the fellowship. This monotheistic love centric thought is a central principle of JCFC which JCFC strives to demonstrate through their deeds and actions agape love towards fellow disciples, families, neighbors, and the world. The communal experience of God's

unconditional love manifested in their life experiences made JCFC unique in the ways they see and experience God's favor.

By choosing to unite with this fellowship of Jesus followers, one becomes exposed to teachings that requires adherence to a sacramental lifestyle. Through obedience one enters into a covenant relationship with God supported by the spiritual disciplines of prayer which is a key cornerstone of JCFC. Prayer is encouraged daily, corporately five times per week and once monthly. Fasting is done corporately once per week, three times per year and as lead individually or corporately. Daily mediation, praise, worship, and study are practiced. These religious rituals are rooted in the Standards for Disciples. These guidelines inspire disciples into a lifestyle to give sacrificially and cultivate fellowship with God.

Under the leadership of the Chief Prelate/Senior Pastor and Chief Visionary Officer, JCFC embarked on a mission-driven path of envisioning ministry based on love. And codified in their mission statement is the scriptural underpinning that gives meaning to their shared experiences; Galatians 5:6b "the only thing that counts is faith working through love." Similarly, when the Apostle Paul wrote this letter to the Galatian churches in 54AD, he wanted to make sure members in the new community of faith were on the right path of truth. By affirming the main message of faith, love. A transformative love based on God's divinity and freedom to be agents in the lives of family, community, and the world.

As a ministry birthed out of love, JCFC has chosen to be intentional about sharing a gospel message that is rooted in love. Being an extension of God's love manifested in their lives, they have adopted the designation of "disciples" rather than "members" to affirm their decision to be followers of Jesus teachings. The teachings of Jesus provide the biblical foundation for a shared understanding as a community of believers striving to live in obedience to God's word.

Obedience means doing what God last told one to do before one does anything else. Disciples are afforded the opportunity to become recipients of God's blessings in various and immeasurable ways through obedience. And the blessing of God also enables the outpouring of favor within each disciples live. Favor ensuring from obedience bestows preferential status on a disciple in the midst of life experiences. As a result, God's blessings, and favor produce testimonies of victory over every situation in life.

By most standards, JCFC is a small and growing fellowship. It's the spiritual home to about seventy-five members at the mother well in Canarsie, but there are satellite locations and hundreds of disciples and partners globally. Established in 2010, JCFC World Outreach Ministries connects people and nations and serves as the governing body for its partnering leaders and affiliating bodies worldwide. According to its website, www.thewellatagape.com, the educational component further provides theological and leadership training for church planters and disciple-making leaders throughout six continents through Agape Center for Theological Studies (ACTS). Furthermore, to build a stronger network, in 2015 JCFC became the thirty-third covenant fellowship of Dunamis Covenant Connection (DCC) under the leadership of the archbishop.

As a result of Covid-19, like many other religious institutions JCFC worship services and other events moved to a virtual platform sanctuary. In the case of JCFC, the virtual space is in Zoom. During virtual worship experience, the personal testimonies of disciples foster an awareness of God's presence that inspires and encourages them. Testimonies affirm that God is an active participant in the affairs of their lives, resulting in restoration and transformation.

The process through which lives are restored and changed involves incorporating a lifestyle of obedience in relationship with God and each other. As relationships of trust and love are cultivated, the ability to work together on one accord serves as a model for effective ministry.

By adhering to a circle ministry model each disciple is afforded the opportunity to collaborate with other disciples towards the achievement of goals and objectives within each ministry. The key objectives of JCFC focus on the family as discipleship encourage family by family. In addition, of the seven areas of ministry the importance of family is emphasized: resurrecting men; empowering women; saving children; restoration of families and securing future generations. Serving as a measurement of ministry excellence and effectiveness, the achievement of goals and objectives is an essential barometer of progress. Goals and objectives are articulated and implemented by the Bishop. As the Chief Visionary Leader entrusted with, the vision and plan, implementation occurs in three aspects of service: discipleship, leadership, and empowerment. Discipleship is fostered through Covenant Leaders, who serve on behalf of the Bishop in keeping covenant with disciples. Keeping covenant ensures that the spiritual, physical, and emotional needs of disciples are met and strengthened.

Leadership is a composition of two distinct working groups of the Vision Council and Ministry Circles. The Vision Council handles articulating the strategic direction and continuity of ministry activities to ensure excellence and effectiveness. Equally important are the twelve Ministry Circles that ensure goals are achieved and the work is conducted. As in any organization, the cooperation and cohesiveness of members are essential for growth and sustainability.

Moreover, service is the ability to do ministry through empowerment. Empowerment is achieved through teaching and preaching, which are the primary responsibility of ministers and

other leaders undergoing training for ministry. Under the Bishop's tutelage, elders, deacons, ministers, adjutants, ministers in training and disciples in discernment are afforded the opportunity to develop their gifts and talents as they receive guidance and directions. Through this process, the ministry leaders take part in their own development while aiding in the growth and development of the disciples within the ministry. It is the outcome of utilizing their ministerial gifts that bring glory and praise to God and kingdom builders.

As kingdom builders, the community has envisioned new ways of accomplishing ministry within the community. And with the construct of the teaching, they have adopted the teachings of Jesus as the primary means of understanding their purpose. It becomes disingenuous to consider oneself a Jesus follower and not know Jesus by the words he spoke concerning her/himself.

Knowing Jesus requires the deepest possible level of understanding to avail oneself to the poser that is able to bring about change in our lives' experiences. As Jesus followers endeavoring to show the world a more excellent way, disciples are encouraged to be like Jesus in their obedience to God's will. As Jesus fully understood God's will and plan for his life, disciples must arrive at the same understanding that will enable them to manifest their divine purpose.

The manifestation of calling is the portal through with disciples are afforded access to the promises of God. As they manifest these promises, they are reminded that God has supplied them everything that is needed to bring froth miracles in their lives. Birthing miracles becomes a focal point of seeing God bring forth transformed lives in the midst of family and community.

Opportunities within the community exist for seeing lives resurrected, empowered, saved, and restored. Through resurrected lives, individuals are granted a new lease on life that allows them to become empowered, transformed and restored back into relationship with God and

others. It is designed to within a five-mile radius of engagement in which evangelistic outreach is a normative course of action. Through relationship building, the lives of girls, boys, women, and men are impacted by the gospel message that speaks of freedom, power, and love.

As one examines the ministry composition, one will find a predominance of women of all ages, these women are single, married and head of households. Consequently, empowering women is an area of ministry. As men traditionally are a missing part in many faith communities, the resurrecting of men is emphasizing thus the ministry to men looks to grow through outreach efforts. Serving as models and mentors, older mature men assume the role for younger men. The ministry to children and teens recognizes the anointing that is upon them and strives to cultivate their gifts and talents that is an expression of the kingdom of God in our midst. Through the pursuit of educational excellence, the ministry has disciples who have obtained undergraduate through doctoral levels of education. The components correlate to various professions, including, but not limited to educators, attorneys, bankers, health professionals and public and private administrators. The ministry is about families and their life stories being expressed in the context of the biblical story.

Yet, as the family structure continues to evolve, *things are not what they used to be* as lives are being disjointed. So, I wonder if these are the days Paul alluded to in his pastoral epistle to the church: people being lovers of themselves, boastful, abusive, disobedient to parents, loveless (2 Timothy 3:1-9). Or as Bob Marley puts it, *this may be the first trumpet.*

As people are exposed to ministry that looks to "love people back to life," transformation becomes an outward expression of an inward change. As lives are being brought back from the brink of both spiritual and physical death, new life in Jesus become a present reality. Once individuals' lives have been saved, resurrected, empowered, it becomes a progressive movement

into a place of family empowerment, security, and strength. This empowerment happens through a consciousness of being faithful to a committed relationship with God and people.

Being faithful comes through one's ability to always seek first God's kingdom and God's righteousness, "put God first" in the affairs of life. And it is the ability to trust God despite COVID-19, the adversity and challenges faced daily. God's character is love and humans are Imago Dei, made in the image God. God's story is one of love for humanity, redemption, and restoration of the family. The family in consistent struggle with love, separation, identity, and purpose. Therefore, it is in this context that this theology of love demonstration project seeks to focus on strengthen family relationships.

Canarsie[131]: Fenced Area Farmland to Residential Community – From Native Americans to West Indians Americans Families

Name after the original Canarese Native Americans pioneers, the Canarsie section of Brooklyn, New York was one of the tribe's main villages. The Canarsie Indians grew cornfields on the land. The land is characterized as grassy, marshy, and upland. However, with the arrival of the Dutch and other European colonists in the 17th centuries, the Natives' ancestral land was divided and sold off to different immigrants. Pieter Claesen Wyckoff is known to be one of the first such European immigrants to build in the area which became plantation style farmland. The Wyckoff's home is still in existence and is believed to be the oldest structure in New York State. With the European migrant's settlement, fishing became the commodity of the community. However, slavery was deeply rooted within the socio-economic structure of the county and in

[131] Canarsie Brooklyn. Retrieved, December 21, 2021. *https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Canarsie,_Brooklyn.*

the1860, the area attracted freed slaves.[132] As a result, a colored town was established about today's Rockaway Parkway and Avenue J.

However, in the late 19th to early 20th centuries, Canarsie was transformed into a summer resort which was later developed into mostly Italians and Jewish suburb. Nevertheless, the racial tensions in the 1970s regarding area schools zoning has resulted in another gradual switch to an influx of people of color. Canarsie has become a mostly residential community populated by people of color of West Indians families. This significant ethnical change resulted as much of Canarsie white population migrated to other suburban communities, Long Island and Staten Island as part of the "white flight" the 1990s national phenomenon.

Categorized as working to middle class neighborhood, tased on the 2010 United States census, the population of Canarsie is 83,693 covering a region of 1,959.94 acres with a density of 42.7 inhabitants per area. The racial makeup of 81% African American; 5.9% Non-Hispanic White; .2% Native American; 2.6% Asian; .4% other races and 1.5% Hispanic/Latinx. The median household income of $80,471 is comparatively higher than the rest of the city. Sixty percent of Canarsie families own homes, which is 3% higher overall within the city. These are one to two family homes which are typically detached. The New York City Housing Authority operates two public housing developments within Canarsie. However, there is a gated community, The Seaview Estates. Which is a condominium complex with wellness amenities. Nevertheless, although 50% of the families struggle with rent payment only 21% live in poverty while the unemployment rate is 9%.

[132] Keith Williams, From Resort Nights to White Flight: a brief history of Canarsie. From resort nights to white flight: a brief history of Canarsie | The Weekly Nabe Retrieved, December 21, 2021

The Canarsie neighborhood resides in Brooklyn community District 18 which includes Flatlands. Accordingly, the New York City Health Department reports an average life expectancy of 82 years which is higher than the median life expectancy within the city. The families consist of mostly middle-aged adults and youths with 25% between the ages of 0-17; 29% 25 – 44; 24% 45 – 64; 13% elderly while 9% are collage age.

While preterm births are more common in Canarsie than other communities in the city, births of teenage mothers are less popular. However, there is a small number of residents who are uninsured or who receive health insurance through the state. The concentration of air pollutant, .0071%, in Canarsie is lower than the citywide average. In comparison to the other residences, the families of Canarsie health needs improvement: 15% are smokers, which is higher than the city average. Furthermore, there is a 30% obesity rate among the community with 21% being children. Fourteen percent are diabetic and 37% have high blood pressure. Even though 81% stated eating fruits and vegetables daily and believe to be in good to excellent health, they are 6% lower than the city's overall 87%. This may be the result of the growth of bodegas which are nine to every one supermarket.

The Canarsie Pier, which is on Jamaica Bay, is a hot spot for fishing. As part of the Gateway National recreation areas, it includes a restaurant and visitor center. There are several parks, including Canarsie Park, within the community which is operated by the New York City Department of Parks and Recreation. The amenities include playgrounds, skatepark, cricket field, baseball courts, soccer fields, tennis courts, natural trails, and dog run. On a yearly basis, JCFC utilizes the Canarsie Park for their annual community day. Families' linkup for a time of koinonia within the community. Music, dancing, games, food, school supplies, health resources, voter registration, this is JCFC' main community outreach initiative.

Public transportation is accessible by the way of a rapid transit line (BMT Canarsie Line); New York City Subway (L Train Line); and the Metropolitan Transpiration Authority (MTA) regional bus operates nine-line routes in Canarsie. Additionally, the main roadways through Canarsie are Remsen Avenue, Rockaway Parkway and Flatlands Avenue. The Belt Parkway serves Canarsie by the way of an exit at Canarsie Pier. There are two shopping centers, Canarsie Plaza, and Brooklyn Terminal Market. There is the Canarsie Cemetery where notable residents such as Bashar Barakah Jackson aka Pop Smoke (1999 – 2020) was laid to rest.

Educationally, 40% of Canarsie's residents twenty-five and older have a college education or higher while 13% have less than a high school education. Forty-eight percent are high school graduates or have some collage level education. The community has six public elementary schools in operation with two educational campuses. The campuses are the result of the transformation of two high schools by the New York City Department of Education in 2006. The community has access to two public libraries and media wise, the Canarsie Courier which was founded in 1921 is the oldest weekly publication in the borough of Brooklyn.

New York City Fire Department Engine Company 257/Ladder Company provides fire protection and professional rescue services. The New York Police Department's 69th Precinct serves the Canarsie area and the 67th manages a small part of the community. Over the years the law enforcement agency reported a declining crime rate.

CHAPTER 2
ANALYSIS OF THE CHALLENGE

"Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength. … Love your neighbor as yourself. There is no commandment greater than these." Mark 12:30 & 31b NIV
"… The only thing that counts is faith expressing itself through love." Galatians 5:6b

Challenge Statement

While ministering at a Jesus-centered faith community in Canarsie Brooklyn, New York challenged by the effects of COVID-19, the traditional family structure continues to shift impacting the lives of its followship and the centrality of the family construct necessitating a new paradigm of love creating a deeper understanding and strengthening of the modern family motif.

This demonstration project will create an educational model utilizing the theology of love to reflect, refocus, reconnect, reimagine, repurpose, and restrengthen family relationships.

Love Matters

At the heart of the universe and the core of all reality there exists an everlasting divine community of pure love. Although love involves a variety of spirited emotional and mental states, love does not self-exist but is relational. However, not everyone expresses, or desires love the same way and accordingly Dr. Gary Chapman identified five love languages in which to express in human relationship: physical contact; words of affirmation; quality time; receiving gifts and acts of service.[133] Knowing an individual's universal love language enhances communication and relationships. As for me, I desire a combination of all five attributes at some point. The early Greek on the other hand, recognized eight distinct types of love:

- Eros – erotic, sexual, passionate, romantic

[133] Gary Chapman, *The 5 Love Languages: The Secret of Love That Lasts,* Northfield Publishing, 2015.

- Philia – affectionate
- Philautia – self-love
- Progma – enduring
- Mania – obsessive
- Ludus – playful
- Storge – familiar
- Agape - selfless, unconditional, divine

Indeed, universal love is transformative and is the greatest power to achieve. Along with faith and hope, love is part of the trilogy that makes up the theological virtues rationalized by Thomas Aquinas. The Apostle Paul believed that love is supreme of the three virtues (1 Corinthians 13:13). Agape is the highest form of love, charity which is the love God has for humanity. Agape is the Greek word for this Divine love.[134] It is a universal unconditional love that transcends and endures regardless of circumstance. For Reinhold Niebuhr, agape is the purest and most potent love which desires nothing in return.[135] Agape is the highest mutuality for individuals to achieve. One may ask, how can people possibly love all neighbors including their enemies; bless those who curse them, do good to those that hate them, pray for those who speak evil about them and persecute them as commanded in the Bible? (Matthew 5:44) The answer is it's only by the transformative Divine power of love that these instructions can be received and achieved. As an example, Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. (1929 – 1968), an American Baptist Minister and activist, believed power worked best with love. This Divine power inspires others in authority to act favorably when they really don't want to; however, they feel compelled to submit. Dr. King used this soft but powerful and effective philosophy of "Divine Love" as a leader in the Civil Rights Movement in the United States of America during the fifties and sixties to achieve positive social results. Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King believed,

[134] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Agape. (Accessed on January 18, 2020).

[135] Ed. Samuel Wells, Christian Ethics: An Introductory Reader. West Sussex: Wiley-Blackwell 2010, 92.

"love transforms with redemptive power,"[136] a divine, loving presence that binds all life. In fact, in his book, *Strength to Love*, Dr. King stated that President Abraham Lincoln was able to transform an enemy into a friend through the power of love.[137] Love is the only force capable of such transformation according to Dr. King.[138] Furthermore, Dr. King's wife Coretta Scott King noted that the driving force behind his quests to eliminate social injustice was Divine Love.[139] The strength to love was the motivating power that ignited Dr. King's fight against injustice. Though he was accused, abused, and oppressed, Dr. King kept focus on his mission of revolutionary love to bring about change against social injustice, knowing that the force of the universe is on the side of justice. Dr. King questioned that if he didn't stop and help the out casted and oppressed what will happen to them?[140] It was Divine love that empowered and compelled Dr. King' mission to eradicate social injustice which was a cause he was willing to die for. In fact, Dr. Peter Heltzel uses Dr. King as a model of ministry and alluded that New York Theological Seminary is training revolutionary leaders to confront injustice and other ungodly formations.[141] He encouraged students to be radical, tap into, reclaim spiritual gifts, and lead the charge of Revolutionary Love. This love is outlined in 1 Corinthians 13. It is through agape that leaders will find the strength and courage to be radical for the Kin-dom of God. It's a love that's worth dying for and will overcome evil.

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[136] Martin Luther King, Jr., "Strength to Love," Fortress Press, PA, 1981, 55.

[137] Ibid, 55.

[138] Ibid, 55.

[139] Ibid, 7.

[140] Ibid, 217.

[141] Peter Heltzel, "Building Revolutionary Leaders" (Lecture, New York Theological Seminary, February 14, 2017).

Agape, love transcends all others. It is the "Love You" that my father uttered to me before he transitioned from earth to eternity, May 18, 2015, which still echoes and stimulates my soul. This love comes from God and resonates within a relational interconnected eternal community. This connectedness is a bonding relationship which is Divine Love. God the creator and ruler of the universe is Love. Irrational love is the unifying force in the Christian Bible and the only path to eternity as stated by Dr. Humberto Alfaro.[142] Love is illogical, But can God's love be self-contained? Certainly not! God's love is communal, relational and perichoresis, creating a rhythmic divine dance of agape into eternity resulting in the Trinitarian Community of Love. Consequently, as humanity continues to evolve, what really matters is faith made effective through love (Galatians 5:6b).

Family Matters

> **"*The house is crumbling down. Where is Love? No family in the home. Family is brought in! There is no family life here. And I was reminded of the Prophet Hosea. The whole country has become a whorehouse: Find a whore and marry. Make this whore the father of your children and here is why? The family is broken. So, I married and had a son and name him Bright Light for people to see… transformation" (11.10.21 Journal Entry).***

There are over 7.7 billion people in the world, of which 332 million resides in the United States of America and they all have one thing in common – family.[143] Family is defined as a group of people united by certain convictions or a common affiliation, such as churches, fellowships and gangs.[144] This group can be one or more parents and their children living

[142] Humberto Alfaro. "Critical Interpretation and Ministry" (Lecture, New York Theological Seminary, September 13, 2016).

[143] The United States Census Bureau, U.S., and World Population Clock. Population Clock: World (census.gov) (Retrieved January 24, 2021).

[144] Family Definition & Meaning - Merriam-Webster (Retrieved January 24, 2022).

together as a unit as well as all the descendants of a common ancestor.[145] The family is essentially a vital structure in the world consisting of people that are faithful to each other in unity to survive by having mutual commitments for life. The main purpose of the family is to take care of each other and protect the children. But how are the children? Are the children well?

In this rapidly transforming world, the traditional understanding of family has been shifting significantly over the years. As a result, the nuclear family of man, woman and children is no longer the standard. Nor is a multigenerational household common. The evolution of human relationships and alliances are being recognized. Whereas different unions such as same-sex marriages are common and, in some cases, children are adopted within this family structure. The blended families bring together parents and children from previous relationships due to separation or divorce are popular. Certainly, these family structures are quite different from the traditional man, woman, children or to add the extension of grandparents and other relatives. Grandparents, uncles, aunts, cousins, siblings, church, and community the extended family is the structure I was born and grew up in. In the 1960's, like most Caribbean families, my parents migrated to Europe and America in search of a financial means to better take care of their six children, I was left in the care of my material grandparents who became my mom and dad. We became a nuclear family in 1970's when mom, dad and seven children reunited in the United States of America. However, our household always includes other people whether blood related or not. Overall, the family is a crucial structure recognized by society and although important, family looks different culturally and generationally.

Community in Crisis – Identity Crisis

[145] Ibid.

On December 21, 2019, New York Theological Seminary students gathered for the closing session for Supervisor Ministry and Mentoring. The culmination of the year study was celebrated with the breaking of bread. Though, the plenary session centered on community responsiveness and the power of a vote and the strategy to change the direction of the current political climate in the United States of America. However, who would have known that when the prophetic voice decreed; “We are in a state of emergency! We are in a state of emergency! We are in a state of emergency!” the alarm she sounded was much greater than political? The proclaimer certainly got the attention of everyone. The declining morality of America lead by a loveless President intensify divisiveness and separatism rather than compassion and unity. And although the nation is turning away from the one true God who desires to have relationship with humanity, there is hope in believing that the weekly prayers for the shalom of the global city is heard.

The breakdown of the Universal Church to reimage effectively while conducting the divine mission and proclaim the Good News has discouraged society. Resulting with the younger generations wanting nothing to do with religious institutions and consequently is not glad to be in the House of the Lord. I have heard the consistent murmurings from my fellow seminarians about their dissatisfaction during the years about Pastors, other Church Leaders, and church structure. They are frustrated with semantics such as posture of worship. Such rituals as asking to stand up during the worship service. The traditional church is indeed declining, ineffective, and out of alignment with God. In fact, some of the teaching and preaching has become more egoist rather than hearing from the Lord, leaving the prophetic voice silent. So, like a loving guardian God has giving society warnings such as this coronavirus to disrupt the usual order of family life in order to bring about a worldwide message of repentance and salvation.

The question of God has been an eternal inquiry. In the Book of Exodus (32:4-7) for example the people saw god as things and wanted to worship metal, stone, and wood. Also, in the Second Testament, when divine power enabled a man to walk, the people wanted to worship the Apostle Paul and Barnabas (1 Corinthians 8:5). So, when a seminarian asked, "who is your God" at a Master's Retreat gathering, the question invoked a divine answer. Needless to say, although the professor response was found in the 23rd Psalms, clearly in this present time, God is still being replaced with idols such as technology, money, career, education, degree, people, athletes, musicians, actors, entertainers and on and on. God clearly commanded that there should be no other gods before the Almighty God (Exodus 20:3) because our Relational Triune God does not like to compete with idols but wants people's full attention. Just the way my son needed my presence, interruptions such as a pandemic forces family in a quarantine position to deal with their issues of life.

Leadership Matters

For four years (2017 – 2021) during the start of the COVID-19 crisis, the most powerful and influential country in the world, was led by a pseudo transformational leader. The President and his family were more self-consumed with their own interest rather than the wellbeing of the people they served. From the start, he downplayed the severity of the pandemic and jeopardize the lives of people with false and confusing information such as individuals don't have to wear masks and COVID-19 was under control. America's first family's moral values demonstrated a lack of genuine love for people and a narcissistic behavior where lies are confused with truth and become alternative facts. A mirage, tricking people into believing what they are really seeing is a false narrative. This reality is a macrocosmic of society which affects the entire culture, community, neighborhood, and family.

There is no doubt that the Covid-19 Coronavirus pandemic and its effects are unprecedented and devastated. The pandemic disrupted the socioeconomic and social wellbeing of the nations and as a result it created social distress and extreme trauma on the family even for families that suffer no financial lost, partially due to unexpected school closures and the widespread risk of illness and death. These physiological, emotional, and spiritual effects as people are grieving not only death of family members preventing them from the final farewells of loved ones, but also loss of employment and financial stability. This reality affected especially those who are deemed frontline essential workers. Take Tamara for example, she is a top nurse at a major hospital in New York City. In the midst of the pandemic, she lost several family members, father, grandmother, and uncle within a matter of months. However, due to the high demand for health care professionals, she was unable to take sufficient bereavement days off. Tamara works long hours six days per week and by the time she gets home to her two young children (12 and 8), she is exhausted. However, in her weariness, she has to help her children with schoolwork and make sure they are taken care of before going to bed.

Yet, there are other family members, whether essential or not who have the opportunity to work remotely or at home. Working from home has its advantages, such as more time to spend with each other, especially during sit-down meals together. On the other hand, not all families will have positive experiences. According to John Hopkins Covid-19 update article, domestic abuse is on an increase in some cases where families are spending more time together.[146] "Families may feel crowded, frustrated that they can't escape one another. At the same time,

[146] Coronavirus and Domestic Violence: What You Should Know | Johns Hopkins Medicine (Retrieved January 24, 2022).

they're isolated from extended family and friends and can no longer participate in many enjoyable and relaxing activities."[147] Some families are encountering more arguments with all the additional stresses of a virtual environment especially since work, school and church issues collide at home, and family members become the recipients of disputes and frustrations.

Family Under Construction

Once an essential structure is targeted to be saved and reconstructed, a plan is made for construction. The builder imagines expansion and modernization of the structure. However, in the restoration process the construction zone becomes messy from the debris. Why? Because walls need to be torn down, old fixtures need to be uprooted and discarded. Similarly, God's people are under construction and how does it feel to be under construction? It can be painful at times. The pain can be resistance. Resistance to change. To change and be brand new. A renewed spirit, a renewed mind, a renewed soul, and a renewed body. In this pandemic season, humanity is under construction and must change. Instead of resisting change, go with the flow. Change is for the good of humanity. Our spirit, the spirit of families, is being renewed and strengthened!

Generation to Generation – Tension between the Generations

An iGeneration Family Prayer

> ***God, I pray to you now please save my family. I pray for your light to shine through me so I can help them. I pray for the children in this house and the ones waiting to be born. I pray for healing from all tragedies and for unity.***
>
> ***I thank you for showing me the spirit and for guiding me to my purpose always. I know now why you have put me in this situation. I know now that it's bigger than me and I will do everything I can to protect my family. Thank you, God, for your wisdom and guidance. Thank you for saving my family. Amen*. (2.27.22)**

[147] Ibid.

People are living longer and in some cases a family has five to six surviving generations and due to different views and experiences, there is tension. Behaviors are captured in digital platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat, and Twitter to understand the relationship between people and what to expect of the rising generation. The newer "Tik Tok" generation is highly video and social media focus. This iGeneration is one of the most diverse generations with high levels of education, digital nativism, social and cultural awareness, and high propensity to be more expressive. Their confidence in speaking their truth takes much understanding, wisdom, and patience. As an example, my current household is comprised of three generations and my baby boomer self is learning to effectively communicate with the two "Tik Tok" 12- and 15-year-old girls adopted in the household. They move at their own pace and have no problem telling me what they won't do. One day I told my 15-year-old granddaughter to prepare some carrots for herself to eat as snack. Her response was, "I don't feel like chopping." Now if my grandmother told me to do anything it was done immediately without any other response but yes!

Surely this task is not new since the beginning of time the all-knowing God's love and desire for family relationship had a master script for creation. This divine plan included a spiritual being in God's own image with free will. However, humanity's capacity to go against God's plan caused disruption resulting with spiritual and physical death within creation. But God's eternal love for creation provides restoration through Jesus Christ. So, we are connected in a Divine Mystery as spiritual beings in a love deprived world which is currently in turmoil. The challenge of love and family being addressed is an amazing task especially as one seeks a new paradigm of love to create a deeper understanding to strengthen the contemporary family in the midst of pandemics.

Ideas

Andrew Billingsley's innovative work on "The Strengths of African American Families" can be used as guidance on how the challenge can be addressed. According to this sociological study, the effective surviving strategies of contemporary families are based on heritage. In this case African culture. However, although Billingsley focused on the African American Families, the assessment applies to families in general. Strong religious orientation, strong kinship bonds, flexible family roles, extended-family networks and informal adoption process are strong cultural patterns identified.

This is an opportunity to create new tradition and family rituals, by establishing meaningful interactions that foster closeness and unity amongst generations. My family and I have been connecting on a daily basis by the way of Zoom platform. The initial intent of this daily habit was for generational engagement, a way for my 82-year-old mother who currently resides in Jamaica West Indies to collaborate with her children and grandchildren. However, most often my six (6) siblings and I along with mom are on. Periodically, a grand and or great grand hop on to say hello. Occasionally, other family members and friends join our time of checking in. We taught our mom how to use the digital platforms zoom and Facebook. Now, she is particularly good at using technology for virtual churches and keeps up with current affairs. The family gathering begins with prayer, inspirational reading and ends with mother's prayer.

Effective communication is the secret sauce and a tool to address this challenge. Understanding how interaction between the generations is vital. The ministry of presence is critical in the process of reconnecting family relationships. The insufficiency of parental presence has resulted in emotionally unstable children. In the role of chaplaincy, the ministry of presence allows one to first understand self and get in-touch with one's emotions and feelings. For how can one effectively minister to others if she/her have not dealt with self? This learning

will then enable you to truly be emphatic, be present and minister to people in need. The rebuilding process starts with self-first, then one can effectively strengthen family and relationships. Healing circles based on specific circumstances can be established as a way of restoration. For example, a group of young adult men were in a car accident over five years ago. Although not deadly, this tragic event still has traumatic effects because these friends have not dealt with the situation therefore the relationships are disconnected and need to be restored.

Another method on how the problem can be addressed is based on the familiar African proverbs, “it takes a village to raise a child” placing emphasis on the impact of community and the importance of support from others in raising children. But what about the elderly who are also vulnerable and need to be respected and honored? This concept is applicable to the generational circle of life. In the circle of life, it’s important to understand and know family history in order to know oneself and prevent an identity crisis. Consequently, the connective wisdom of the elders, the strength of the youth and a childlike spirit bring about unity strength in family relationships. This interconnecting generational circle creates the powerful circle of love. And as a result, the power of love creates a rhythm, dance and beat to bring healing. Healing the mind, body and soul and thereby restoring the family. However, what does the modern village look like and how has it changed? What does it take to teach a child now and how can the child and elder collaborate?

CHAPTER 3
RESEARH QUESTIONS

What is the significance of the family in the 21st century? How has the understanding and focus on family changed and ho has COVID-19 impacted family structure?

The study of the history of the family has been an ongoing sociological interest. Currently, there are a variety of genealogy and family tools with the intent to find biological family linkage and build family tree structure. Sites such as Ancestry.com have over 2.4million Facebook followers. Deoxyribonucleic Acid (DNA) kits are also popular as a means to identify family hereditary. Biblically, the origin of the family stemmed for God's creation of the world and making Eve and Adam in God's own imagine. The introductory to our Christian Bible methodical and chronologically outlines the creation story of heavens, earth and then all relating to the earth including humanity. The Genesis account states, "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth" (Gen 1:1). Now, the plurality of the word heaven suggests that God created many universes but only one single earth which consists of everything other than heavens. Nevertheless, simply out of nothingness *Elohim* the Triune God create, sharp and form (*bara*) the heavens, stars, universe, sky (*hassamayim*) and the earth, land, inhabitants, territory, people of the land (*haares*). A reasonable question to ask is so where was God prior to this *creatio ex nihilo* act? But God clearly cannot be intellectualized, and such thoughts suggest the concept of time which God is beyond as well as space and matter. In fact, some theologians like Augustine believed time to have been a created entity in the beginning[148]. Simply, God exists into eternity and there was no time prior creation day one. Furthermore, according to Tillich this creation doctrine is not a once upon

[148] Hodgson, Peter Crafts, and Robert Harlen King. *Readings in Christian Theology.* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1985), 118 – 119.

a time story nor the description of an event, but God's divine creative relationship with the world[149]. Essentially, God and creation are one. Thus, creation is divine providence which must be sustained and preserved. This I believe is achieved with consistent theism, God's continual interrelationship with humanity rather than consistent deism or theistic deism.[150] The omniscient God is indeed observing but does not interfere with the freedom of creations in the divine script.

Who are we as human beings is an eternal question to be answered from various doctrinal or theological views. An ecofeminist perspective for example, "assumes that despite the fact that we are human beings, we can know neither God nor human beings by a priori deduction. We will never know human beings any more than partially, and it will always be from clues left behind, from their dreams and from their relationship with all the beings that make up the universe."[151] We know only a particular story of humanity, the one that is told and interpreted by ourselves. Nevertheless, in the continuum of the creation narrative in Genesis, there are two discourses of how humankind came into existence. First, in the doctrine of Imago Dei in chapter one, *Elohim* said "let us make human being (*Adam*) after our own likeness (*kidmutenu)*." Consequently, the Triune God created humankind (*haadam*), male (*zakar)* and female (*unequbah)* in God's own image (betzalmov). The second chapter is the concept of humanity as dust of the earth. The Lord God formed human from the dust (*apar*) of the ground and breathed (give up life) breath, spirit (*nismat*) of life unto human's nostrils and the creature became a living being (*lenepes*) with a soul, mind, desire, and emotion. Noted early Christian Theologian Augustine discussed that from the dust of the earth which God creatio ex nihilo, the first human parents became a living body when

[149] Ibid, 141-142.

[150] Ibid, 144.

[151] Gebara, Ivone, *Longing for Running Water: Ecofeminism and Liberation*. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1999), 95.

human being received soul, the spirit of God.[152] Humanity created in the image of God and dirt of the earth may seem paradoxical, but it's the unification of the body which comes from the earth and the life giving Spirit which is Divine that produced humanity. So, the mortal body and spiritual immortal soul united as one living being and as a result, we are all linked together as one human entity.[153] Indeed out of Adam, humanity is one spirit into one body and the Spirit is God. Therefore, as the Apostle Paul declared to the Corinthians, we are not identified by sex, gender, race, religion, class, origin, culture, but one spiritual human race. It's vital to understand that we are all apart of God's body and we need one another to survive as Hezekiah Walker song, *I Need You*, reminds us. However, human creature was created with free will, the autonomy to make choices, to walk in the will of God or not. On the other hand, there is Divine Providence, the notion that God cares for and governs all aspects of creation. Nevertheless, humanity is soul, body, and Divine Breath with the capacity for free will.

How is love understood in the Biblical narrative? This project will study the meaning of love in the prophetic narratives, Gospel Stories and Pauline literature to develop a new theology of love.

The Bible is a love story between God and creation A key feature of Christianity is God's sovereignty over creation. God, the Supreme Being commanded and out of nowhere, nothingness the supernatural act *creatio ex nihilo* occurred. God declared God's creation is good and blessed it (Genesis 1). Yet, this same God expressed relational love for humanity by making humankind in the Imago Dei. Now why did this Supreme God fashion humanity in the likeness of God and entrusted people to be custodians of the world (Genesis 1:27-28)? Some scholars believe the God of creation made human beings in the image of God for the purpose of a loving relationship. God

[152] Hodgson, Peter Crafts, and Robert Harlen King. *Readings in Christian Theology.* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1985), 148 - 151.

[153] Ibid, 149.

is relational and desires a personal association with all creation. However, this special connection between God and humanity was estranged when God's created beings went against God's will and as a result became separated from God.

This narrative is like that of a mother child relationship. After giving birth, the mother is proud of her offspring and when she looks at the child, she sees her reflection. But, one day like the prodigal son in the Gospel of Luke 15 discourse, the child left home and neglected the mother. This is heartbreaking, to be separated from your likeness, creation, and fruit of your womb. Separation is traumatic for all parties involved. We can only imagine the emotional state of the parents of the over five hundred migrant children who are separated at the boarders of the United States of America, especially since these children are reported to be lost and cannot be found.[154]

The three accounts mentioned above exemplify the dilemma of separation. Whether divinely or humanly, separation is destructive because people are interconnected and need each other. Human beings are not meant to live in isolation. In fact, our current health crisis, due to the COVID-19 pandemic has created a state of social isolation resulting in anxiety and fears. This dilemma will result in future mental health concerns. People strives best communally and are relational like their Creator God. For that reason, reconciliation, the restoration of relationships is essential to creation's existence. The text puts it this way:

> Just as in sin we separate ourselves from God, so God reconciles himself with us in grace. That is the basic Christian affirmation. God's turning to us is grace, which removes the obstacles to the relationship between God and human beings. If sin means separation, segregation, isolation, and alienation, then grace is the reunion of the living with the origin of life – and thus precisely with God wills. It is simply the happiness of no longer being separated. The wish of reunion is one of

[154] Cartlin Dickerson, NYTimes.com, October 21, 2020, Parents of 545 Children Separated at the Border Cannot Be Found - The New York Times (nytimes.com) (Access January 29, 2021).

> the deepest human wishes, and it is precisely for the reason that separation is so destructive. To be with God means no longer to be separated.[155]

God reconciliation to humanity is an act of Love which breaks the cycle of estrangement caused by original sin between humanity and God. This action is similar to the unconditional love relationship of a mother to her children and the joy of a father to see the return of a son. We all know the act of God's redeeming love to compensate for the sin of this world as mentioned in John 3:16 "For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life." The script further states, "Indeed, God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him" (John 3:17). This is the message of salvation that brings humankind back together with God.

From the beginning humankind's bond with God has been a story about parental love. God created the world and everything in it based on love. Certainly, God has been brokenhearted over human beings' choice to turn against God, but people have a choice to be reconciled to God through Christ and commit to the message of reconciliation (II Corinthians 5:18-20). This is a free love gift from God. Emphasizing the importance for humanity to live in love, Jesus summarized the scriptures into two commands: Love God with all you heart, soul, and mind; and love your neighbor as yourself (Matthew 22: 37-38). At the heart of the universe and the core of all reality there exists an everlasting divine community of pure love. Although love involves a variety of spirited emotional and mental states, love does not self-exist, but love is relational.

What are the theologies of love that can guide this project?

[155] Dorothee Solle, Thinking About God: an Introduction to Theology (Philadelphia: Trinity Press International, 1990), 9.

The theologies of love guiding this project will focus on Christology and the Pauline characteristic of love directing women, men, boys, and girls to a more excellent way. This agape love is the greatest love to give a family. If I speak in the tongues of mortals and of angels, but do not have love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. And if I have prophetic powers and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing. If I give away all my possessions, and if I hand over my body so that I may boast, but do not have love, I gain nothing. (1Corinthians 13:1-13 NRSV).

Love is patient
Love is kind
Love is not envious
Love is not boastful
Love is not arrogant
Love is not rude
Love does not insist on its own way
Love is not irritable
Love is not resentful
Love does not rejoice in wrongdoing
Love rejoices in the truth
Love bears all things
Love believes all things
Love hopes all things
Love endures all things
Love never fails.

CHAPTER 4
PLAN OF IMPLEMENTATION

Goals and Strategies

Based on the guidelines of biblical engagement the research project will strive to determine how meaning is made through the discovery process that identifies transformative occurrences focused on the values, beliefs, and cultural settings of the JCLC. This active research project strives to establish a communal understanding of the theology of love as it relates to family as a means of transforming and empowering family relationships. Ultimately this mutual meaning is understood to be represented through interactive communication that utilizes signs, symbols, traditions, and practices. The discipline and practice of qualitative research will be the methodology utilized inclusive of creating a narrative that is built upon.

Goal 1: To discover, define and describe the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic within the families of the JCLC community.

Strategy 1: Determine the Demographic to target (JCLC, SMBC, BCPC) for a comprehensive analysis utilizing three to four religious' institutions in Brooklyn, New York.

Strategy 2: Create and implement a survey. Design questions for the questionnaire regarding the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. This includes questions raised in the challenge statement. Ensure questions to be clear, concise, and based on utilize an open response format to solicit responses. Provide introductory information for respondents.

Strategy 3: Analyze data to be utilized for the basis of examining shared and contrasting views of the family structure and effects of COVID-19. Report on the outcomes of the survey.

Evaluation of Goal 1: The results of the survey will be utilized to further understand the family structure and determine the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic within the lives of the family within JCLC community. Once consensus based on a shared understanding of defined terms is achieved, the evaluation process will seek to ensure that the challenge statement remains critically important to the process in defining an adaptable mission conscious goal of bringing together a communal understanding of the critical components of an effective proposed solution for examining and addressing disparate views of the family structure and effect of COVID-19.

As meaning is being made through an awareness process related to the challenge being presented in The Theology of Love, Family Guardian project,, the evaluation process must seek to measure the impact other voices related to the historical significance of the problem bring into context through personal testimonials of their lives that will foster a shared reality of the achievement and attainability of reconnect, reimagine and restrengthen family relationships.

Goal 2: Based on the Survey results, create involvement, reflection circles with the purpose of reflecting, focusing and reimagine family. What's Family Love?

Strategy 1: Present, review and discuss historical accounts of the family and significance of strengthening relationships. Examine excerpts from Robert Hill's *"The Strengths of African American Families;"* research Ibram Kendi and Keisha Blain's *Four Hundred Souls* and Nikole Hannah-Jones's *The 1619 project* to provide historical cultural context.

Strategy 2: Conduct family focus awareness sessions within the JCLC community during the period of the Theology of Love, Family Guardian demonstration project timeframe. These sessions will utilize the Gospel stories, Pauline literature and prophetic narratives for biblical engagements to study the meaning of love.

Strategy 3: Assist family circle participants to make connections and discuss the significance of developing and sustaining the family structure. Utilize personal interviews, documentation and other resources that promote building family relationships.

Evaluation of Goal 2: Engage in processes that enable participants to assess the effectiveness of the learning sessions as a means to understanding the impact.

Goal 3: Build upon the foundational culture of the JCLC community, establish an ongoing educational model/program that effectively strengthens family relationship pre and post crisis and foster collaboration amongst generations.

Strategy: The strategies will be determined based on the need within the JCLC community which will be determined as a result of the survey and active engagement during the project timeframe.

Evaluation Overall: The modes of assessment of all endeavors for the Theology of Love, Family Guardian project will be evidenced through the restorative transformation of family relationships wellbeing.

CHAPTER 5
MINISTERIAL COMPENTENCIES

I press on toward the goal for the prize of the heavenly call of God in Christ Jesus (Philippians 3:14).

A challenge is never meant to be easy, once accepted there is a preparation process with the understanding that one must wrestle with the mission. This mission requires one to face the opponent, stretching; mind, body, and soul, expanding; view and thoughts, conquering doubts and discovering endless possibilities. Surely the process is painful and grievous but knowing the purpose of the mission is the sustainable factor that pushes one to endure to the end. Empowering, transforming, and saving women, men, children, families, humanity, lives that's the power of this mission. Not by might nor by power but by the Spirit of Almighty God. Therefore, with God being my helper, I will endure to the end.

Important to the Theology of Love – Family Guardian active research project I have embarked upon, is the success and sustainability of the end result. The implementation of an education model and program requires proficiency in essential ministerial areas. Take into consideration the site, JCLC of my project a faith-based approach requires that I develop an understanding/knowledge and hone specific areas that will support me in ministry. Clearly all the sixteen ministerial competencies: theologian, preacher/interpreter of sacred texts, worship leader, prophetic agent, leader, religious/spiritual educator, counselor, pastor, spiritual leader, ecumenist, witness or evangelist, administrator, professional, financial management, technology/social media management and cultural proficiency are significant. However, for the purpose of this project, the three areas that will require greater emphasis to accomplish the goals and of which I will need to be capable in are leadership, technology/social media management and cultural proficiency. The process of deciding was in collaboration with the Senior Leader of JCLC.

Technology/Social Media Management

Technology is the scientific application of knowledge to discover and develop meaningful ideas or solve problems.[156] It is the capacity to put meaningful innovative solutions into practice. In our rapidly changing society where time and space collide knowledge and creativity are key characteristics in this digital age. The various social media interactive technologies allow people to enter the virtual world to share ideas, information, and expressions. This computer-generated world where iPhone and screen time devices are replacing family's face to face interaction and time, can be learned. Understanding this space is critical because people are interconnected and were created to be in effective social relationships. Thus, human beings need physical contact so although innovative technology is good, it is also bad. It's good to have the capacity to see and hear family members during a time of social distance, but what's the socioemotional effects? How does love shows up in this space? Among the list of ideas as to how to utilize technology within this framework: launch an internet campus; construct a contemporary worship space; design a church logo; make a motion loop; shoot video on a green screen, build a website, produce a mobile app, podcase sermons, layout and print dazzling mailers, run a digital mixer and light board, maximize presentation software, craft daily blogs, tweet and collaborate with artists I wonder what innovation will the Theology of Love – Family Guardian brings to this theological space? Still, I agree with assessment of candidate competency document provided that regardless of one's vocation a fundamental understanding of technology and media skills are vital to a successful ministry.

Cultural Proficiency

I looked again. I saw a huge crowd, too huge to count. Everyone was there—all nations and tribes, all races, and languages… (Revelation 7:9-12 MSG).

[156] Webster dictionary

In the ministry of love there can be no division, people are all equal in Jesus Christ's family. Hezekiah Walker's lyrics to "*I Need You to Survive*" emphasizes this necessity to value and adapt diversity. Why, because we are all apart of God's family. Certainly, unity is the key to the endurance of the family. Whether racial, creed, gender, age, sexuality, cultural proficiency is necessary to be effective in today's global environment. The survival of humanity depends on our capacity to efficiently love. Ideally the theology of love, family guardian extends globally consequently cultural proficiency is required for the success of this project.

Cultural proficiency practice is an opportunity for self-reflection and self-discovery as was done during my journey at New York Theological Seminary. First while acquiring my master's in divinity and also with the doctoral degree program with the hermeneutics self-inventory reflections. Through this process, I have concluded that my hermeneutical lens is a combination of my over fifty years' experience as a Caribbean, Naturalized American Citizen, Economic Migrant, Licensed Protestant Minister, Professional Banker as well as a Black Woman living in the United States of America. Certainly, I have taken various diversity training sessions in corporate America, but learning is a continuous process. So, as a leader I must continue enhancing my knowledge, skills, attitudes, and beliefs that enable people to work effectively and be supportive of people in cross-cultural settings. Cultural competency is a vital tool to cultivate a loving relationship with people. This competency goes against prejudice and ethnocentrism which is, "the tendency for individuals to place their own group (ethnic, racial, or cultural) at the center of their observations of others and the world. The perception that one's own culture is better or more natural than the culture of others. It's like a perceptual window through which people from one's culture make subjective or critical evaluations of people from another culture.

Both ethnocentrism and prejudice interfere with our ability to understand and appreciate the human experience of others."[157]

Cultural proficiency as stated in the assessment competency guidelines is sensitive to the world view of other cultures and the following is a list of abilities associated with this knowledge: express one's biases or prejudices and understands how they might affect; cross-cultural interactions; identify one's ethnic group; ability to identify one's own culturally specific practices; mature self-awareness, placing particular emphasis on power, authority; family history and cultural contexts as these dynamics influence the practice of supervision and ministry; demonstrate respect for the cultural and religious values of those I serve and refrain from imposing my own values and beliefs on others; aware of the social location of my upbringing, with its ethnic; ties and cultural context, and the movement in and out of successive; social locations and cultural contexts in my life journey.

Leadership

> *Leadership is a process whereby an individual influences a group of individuals to achieve a common goal.[158] A leader is one who creates an environment in which the gifts of the Spirit may flourish. She or he is effective in empowering others to realize their own calling or gifts and facilitates opportunities in which others can flourish. Such a person is characterized by a willingness to listen and respond, the capacity to take the initiative with appropriate, the ability to delegate responsibility to capable people, and the sensitivity to share resources.[159]*

As a leader in Corporate America a key performance responsibility is to coach and develop individuals within the team. This action is directly in line with the company' purpose to power individuals to succeed. Embracing and managing change as an example is an expected behavior to thrive within the organization. This is the time of year when difficult decisions are

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[157] Mentoring and Leadership Formation Seminar, Reflection: Culture and Leadership. October 30, 2020.

[158] Northhouse, Peter, G. Leadership: Theory and Practice, 8th edition. (Western Michigan University: SAGE Publication, 2018.), 5.

[159] New York Theological Seminary, Doctoral of Ministry Program Assessment of Candidate Competency.

made regarding elimination of positions as the company needs to reduce costs to sustain expected profitability. As a result, many employees were let go through the firm recently. In addition, the company is going through a major technological transformation project.

As an authentic leader, I believe in providing honest, transparent, and timely communication to my team. Therefore, last week when I received the news about our colleagues who were let go by the company, I called my team members individually to let them know what was going on and discuss the situation. Subsequently, I was encouraged and appreciative to know my team affirms that I had the courage to lead and integrity. "Thank you for valuing other people by showing respect, doing your best to keep other's feelings in mind and your careful consideration of people's ideas." "Primrose, Thanks for your leadership and guidance." These were the comments submitted by two of my staff members as they acknowledged me at work through the company' recognition program.

In our In our readings on Transformational Leadership and Adaptive Leadership, I can see where my style is a combination of both styles. According to Northouse, "transformational leadership is a process that changes and transforms people. It is concerned with emotions, values, ethics, standards, and long-term goals. It includes assessing followers' motives satisfying their needs and treating them as full human beings. Transformational leadership involves an exceptional form of influence that moves followers to accomplish more than what is usually expected of them. It is a process that often incorporate charismatic and visionary leadership."[160] On the other hand, adaptive leadership "is about how leaders encourage people to adopt to face and deal with problems, challenges and change." I have a responsibility to prepare and encourage my team to deal with the changing work environment and culture, but individuals are

[160] Ibid, 164.

responsible to resolve issues that may occur. Furthermore, they are encouraged to be responsible for their learning and development to effectively meet the demands of robotics.

But, while I possess some adaptive leadership qualities, I am a more transformational leader which is in alignment with the company's leadership behavior. In fact, this style of leadership influences our purpose to "power individuals and institutions to succeed across the financial world."[161] This leadership attribute demonstrates integrity and passion for excellence courage to lead in a way that supports growth across the board individuals, leadership, and institution. But, even in this structure of leadership there is a transactional approach since promotions, bonuses and other incentives are presented to personnel who attain and exceed their set goals.

While my leadership style is a combination of authentic, adaptive, and transformative my strong ethical values and mission to Love compels me to do the right thing even when it's uncomfortable. I am most concerned with the collective good of my team and my self-interest. And I desire to, "say no to wrong. Learn to do good. Work for justice. Help the down-and-out. Stand up for the homeless. Go to bat for the defenseless" (Isaiah 1:17 MSG). Consequently, the pseudo transformational style of leadership goes against my moral values because although transforming, it's in a destructive manner. Pseudo transformational leadership exemplifies within the United States of America's 45th President as he is "self-consumed, exploitive, power oriented with warped moral values."[162] Donald John Trump's personalized leadership behavior is egoist rather than the interest of the nation he serves nor the common good. Over the last four years,

[161] Purpose of Bank of New York Mellon.

[162] Northhouse, Peter, G. Leadership: Theory and Practice, 8th edition. (Western Michigan University: SAGE Publication, 2018.), 165.

this president used the idea of "make America great again" to influence over seventy-four million people to advance his greed for power even though he lacks intellect. I am still perplexed! How did the United States of America allow such narcissist to lead her? Does the ex-president possess such manipulative and dominating power to direct so many top governmental and others towards his own values of lies and evilness? I dare to say, how can one person have so much power? Surely there must be others involved with a bigger hidden agenda. Even with his recent act to cling to power by inciting a "march for Trump" insurrection is just unbelievable. Thank God, that the alleged ultimate plan to capture, execute high governmental official including his Vice President and overturn the election failed! And, to hear that so called Christians also participated in this madness under "Jericho march," a call to pray, fast, march and rally for election integrity is appalling.[163]

My leadership style is hybrid authentic, adaptive, transformative, and a reflection of who I am as a person. My aim is to lead with divine Love because what really matters in life is Love.

Nevertheless, for the purpose of this project I will demonstrate the following: a willingness to learn from others; an ability to communicate an overall sense of direction and to enable other to accomplish it; consistent ability to follow-through on plans; willingness and ability to take initiative when appropriate; willingness and ability to delegate responsibility to capable people; respect for talents and abilities of others, and ability to facilitate their exercise effectively; ability to motivate others to achieve their best efforts; ability to provide support and to follow-up on the initiatives of others; willingness to show appreciation for a job well done (including her own); ability and willingness and/or ability to share knowledge and resources; ability to give constructive criticism effectively.

[163] Will Steakin, Matthew Mosk, James Gordon Meek, and Ali Dukakis, "Longtime Trump advisers connected to groups behind rally that lead to Capitol attack," *Yahoo News ABC News*, January 15, 2021.

PROJECT TIMELINE (*working document*)

Appendix A

Date	Strategy	Task/Activity	Tools needed to complete task	Person(s) Responsible
	NA	Proposal Approval		PSH
2/10/22 7-8pm	NA	Site Team Role/Responsibilities, initial meeting w\Program Director	Submit team members' info to the program director. Send welcome email to STM & inform about mtg	PSH, STM
		Monthly Site Team Meeting		
	Goal 1	**Discovery/Survey**		
	1.1	Develop Survey questions & determine demographics		
	1.2	Develop Survey	Produce through survey website	
	1.3	Administer Survey		
	1.4	Follow-up on Survey		
	1.5	Analyze data from Survey		
	Goal 2	***Analyze, Evaluate, Determine***		
	Goal 3	***Create, Implement***		
TDB 12/22		Project Proposal Submission for Approval		
TBD		ST Letter of Submission for Project Proposal		
TBD		Project Completion		
TDB		ST Letter of Demonstration Project		
TBD		Submission of Demonstration Project		
TBD				
2023		Defense of Dissertation/Oral Presentation		
2023		Graduation		

January – June 2022 work on project
July – October 2022 write.
December 2022 submission

BUDGET (working document)
Appendix B
Estimates cost $35,000.

Date	Task/Activity	Tools Necessary to complete task	Person Responsible	Budgetary Consideration Cost	Source of Funding
	Tuition/fees			**30,000**	
	Proposal approval				
	Initial meet with Site Team & Program Director				
	Meet with ST				
	Develop Survey	Survey Preparation			
	Follow up Survey				
	Analyze Survey				
	Writing & Research	All of the information gathered during the implementation of Goals		500.00	
	Final Project demonstration Write-Up				
	Oral Presentation				
	Graduation				

ACTS

Authentic Communities Transforming Spiritually
Bible Study via Zoom
A study in the Books of Acts - Actions of the Early Church
Monday, November 30, 2020
Rev. Dr. Wanda M. Lundy, Bible Study Leader
Minister Primrose Sinclair Hammond, Presenter

Scripture: Acts 26:19-23

19 "So then, King Agrippa, I was not disobedient[A] to the vision from heaven. **20** First to those in Damascus,[B] then to those in Jerusalem[C] and in all Judea, and then to the Gentiles,[D] I preached that they should repent[E] and turn to God and demonstrate their repentance by their deeds.[F] **21** That is why some Jews seized me[G] in the temple courts and tried to kill me.[H] **22** But God has helped me to this very day; so I stand here and testify to small and great alike. I am saying nothing beyond what the prophets and Moses said would happen[I]— **23** that the Messiah would suffer[J] and, as the first to rise from the dead,[K] would bring the message of light to his own people and to the Gentiles."[L] ((NIV)

19-20 "What could I do, King Agrippa? I couldn't just walk away from a vision like that! I became an obedient believer on the spot. I started preaching this life-change—this radical turn to God and everything it meant in everyday life—right there in Damascus, went on to Jerusalem and the surrounding countryside, and from there to the whole world.

21-23 "It's because of this 'whole world' dimension that the Jews grabbed me in the Temple that day and tried to kill me. They want to keep God for themselves. But God has stood by me, just as he promised, and I'm standing here saying what I've been saying to anyone, whether king or child, who will listen. And everything I'm saying is completely in line with what the prophets and Moses said would happen: One, the Messiah must die; two, raised from the dead, he would be the first rays of God's daylight shining on people far and near, people both godless and God-fearing." (MSG)

Action: Love – The ultimate act of giving without expecting anything in return.

Agape is a Greco-Christian term for unconditional Love, the highest form of love (charity). Agape Love originates from God, Jesus Christ for humanity. Agape embraces a universal love that transcends and persist regardless of circumstance. Agape goes beyond just the emotions to the extent of *seeking the best of others without expecting anything in return*.

The story writer

Luke the writer of Acts was a psysican and although he was not an eyewitness to the life of Jesus Christ, he participate in many of the events mentioned in Acts (16:10-17; 20:5-7; 21:18-19; 27:1-12). Although Acts was written centries ago (approximately AD 62) the world has not really changed much. People are still being oppressed, persecuted and distressed. Strife still exist between religious groups. There is division based on leadership and teachings and of course civil unrest and governmental strife.

The main character (*Obedient, Faithfully carried out his Divine Vision*)

Paul the main character of this story is a Jewish Roman citizen and Apostle of Jesus Chrst. In this text he was arrested in Jerusalem and in prison for around 2 years. He requested to have his trial heard by the highest office of the land, Ceaser. Paul was presenting his case before king Agrippa, military commanders and prominent leaders. What a great opportunity to testify and witness to the power structure of the world!

The Mission to Defend – Telling the story

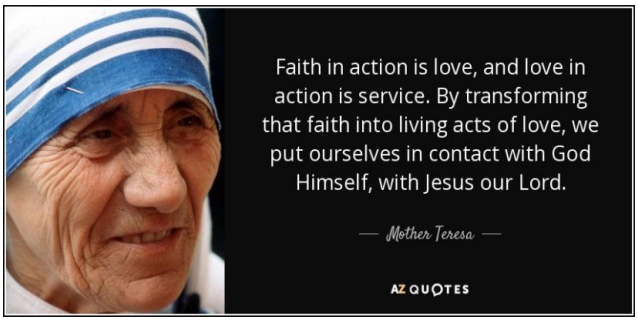
Acts 26:20 Commissioned by Jesus Christ to preach the message of repent (change inner self, old way of thinking) and turn to God, doing deeds and living lives which are consistent with repentance. Proclaim God's message of Love right where you are: at home, community, locally and globally.

Acts 26:21 Our own people will discourage and try to kill our mission. But, Paul declared if God is for us, who can be against us? (Romans 8:31) Nothing shall separate us from the Love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord (Romans 8:39).

Acts 26:22 But we are empowered by the Holy Spirit to work the mission. We have God's Word and promise that God will never leave or forsake us(Deuteronomy 31:6). God is our helper. Testify to small and great alike using God's written word and your testimony.

Acts 26:23 Tell the story of the Gosple of Jesus Christ, the message of salvation so that people's eyes will open, see the Light, the Love of God and be transformed.

What Love got to do with it?

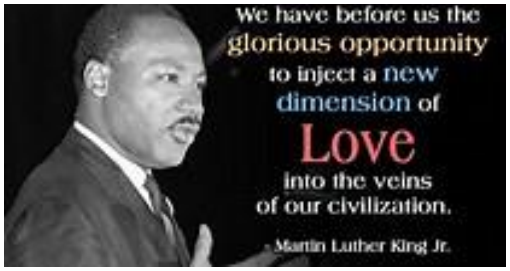


Imagine (Circle of Love discussion)

Keep in mind our current unpresidented enviornment. Image you are a journalist like the writer Luke and you are on assignment to record an accurate story of the current state of the church.

1. What story would you tell?
2. Who would be your featured character(s) and why?
3. How would your story transform lives and encourage the future generations?
4. How will you demonistrate Love in Action during this season?

Closing Reflection:



https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sonYFxHHvaM

Bob Marley

MENTORING FOR THRIVING IN MINISTRY IN THE CITY

THROUGH THE HOPE OF OUR ANCESTORS

The Theology of Love

Why look for the living among the dead?

Scripture: Luke 24: 1-8 (Matthew 28:1-6; Mark 16:1-6; John 20: 1)

The canonic gospels tell a story of a team of women leading a procession to their mentor's tomb very early in the morning. These were women had names, these women had stories. Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James and other women were mentees of Jesus Christ. These women were very supportive of Jesus' ministry. They were delivered from demonic possession and healed for infirmities. These women witnessed the crucifixion, death and burial of their spiritual leader, teacher and mentor. They witnessed the injustice and were motivated by love. Can you imagine the emotional state of these women? They were mourning and grieving; but they were determined to give their mentor the proper burial ritual in order to remember and honor the life of their beloved, Jesus Christ.

Well, what can we learn from these women and their story?

Preparation -- verse 1 we see that the women strategized and started out very early in the morning and were prepared for the burial ritual.

Preparation is important in doing ministry and here at:

NYTS: preparing faith and thought leaders to engage in relevant, restorative and revolutionary ministry.

Spices – (mixed herb) flavor; perfume, **Spices –** anointing, healing; deliverance; transformation

The dead has a right to ceremonial care (anointed with perfumes: nard, myrrh and aloes)

1Corinthians 13 the flavor of Love: spiritual gift of love – the greatest of the 3 (faith, hope, love): patient, kind, not jealous, not brag, not arrogant, unselfish, not arrogant, humble, giving, endure, preserve

Remember – Look back and remember. Remember the stories. In this present time, it's important to learn from the past.

In verse 5 of the text the women were asked: Why do you seek the living One among the dead? He is not here, but He has risen. Remember what was spoken -- though he would be crucified, the third day I will rise again! And the women remembered!

- Why look for the living among the dead?
- To give them the right ceremonial ritual
- To learn from their stories
- To empower and transform lives
- To Resurrect Love

A Theology of Love: A Sankofa Model Survey

Established in 1664, the Old First Cemetery at Siloam-Hope First Presbyterian Church (formerly First Presbyterian Church) on Broad Street near Caldwell Place in Elizabeth, NJ has 313+ free and enslaved Africans buried in unmarked graves. In life-or-death recognizing one's existence is an act of Love. Please complete this brief survey. THANK YOU!

1. Are you aware of the Old First Cemetery, which is located on the Campus of Siloam-Hope First Presbyterian Church (formally First Presbyterian Church) on Broad Street near Caldwell Place in Elizabeth, NJ?

   Mark only one oval.

   - [x] No
   - [ ] Yes

2. The Old First Cemetery contains grave markers dating from the late 17th century to 1917. Are you aware there are 313+ free and enslaved Africans buried in unmarked graves in the Old First Cemetery?

   Mark only one oval.

   - [ ] Yes
   - [x] No

3. The 313+ Ancestors Speak Research Project is designed to give voice to 313+ free and enslaved African Ancestors buried on the grounds of the Old First Cemetery. Are you interested in learning more about the 313+ Ancestors Speak Research Project?

   Mark only one oval.

   - [x] Yes
   - [ ] No

4. A goal is to provide a platform for conversations about relationships amongst the Ancestors buried in the Old First Cemetery and descendants today. Are you interested in supporting this initiative?

Mark only one oval.

- (●) Yes
- ( ) No

5. Can we contact you? If so, please provide your name, email address and phone number below. Thank you!

This content is neither created nor endorsed by Google.

Google Forms

AN INVITATION TO
The Journey To Love
SATURDAY
NOVEMBER 11, 2023
3PM-5PM
SNYDER ACADEMY
42 BROAD ST · ELIZABETH, NJ 07201
RSVP IMMEDIATELY
PSHAMMOND@MAIL.NYTS.EDU / 347-534-8072

THE JOURNEY TO LOVE

Love God. Love Yourself. Love your Neighbor As you Love Yourself.

Check In/Reception

Welcome:

Opening Blessings
Purpose
Remarks

Unity Sand

Monument

Labyrinth Walk

Reflections

Closing Remarks/Blessings Charge to Love

11.11.23

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[i] SHFPC is currently a part of the Presbyterian Church (USA) which is a core protestant denomination in the USA. It stems from the reformed Calvinist tradition with roots originating in Britain. According to the Presbyterian Church USA's website, Christ's First Presbyterian Church in Hempstead New York is listed as the first to be established in colonial America in 1644. The first American Presbytery General Assembly was convened by Reverend John Witherspoon, 1789 in Philadelphia and he was the only minister to sign the Declaration of Independence. Each local church is governed by a body of elected elders called session or church board. Currently the active membership is 1,245,354 and 18,785 ordained ministers in 8,925 congregations at the end of 2020. Like all organized religious institutions, membership is declining and over the years there have been changes within the congregation which significantly shifted the membership and resources. Currently SHFPC's membership is approximately 60 congregants which are predominantly people of color. The church follows the lectionary to guide worship service and other events.